

Werner Herzog Of Walking in Ice

Munich - Paris
11/23 to 12/14, 1974

*Translated from the German by
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Forward

At the end of November, 1974, a friend from Paris called and told me that Lotte Eisner was seriously ill and would probably die. I said that this must not be, not at this time, German cinema could not do without her now, we would not permit her death. I took a jacket, a compass and a duffel bag with the necessities. My boots were so solid and new that I had confidence in them. I set off on the most direct route to Paris, in full faith, believing that she would stay alive if I came on foot. Besides, I wanted to be alone with myself.

What I wrote along the way was not intended for readers. Now, four years later, upon looking at the little notebook once again, I have been strangely touched, and the desire to show this text to others unknown to me outweighs the dread, the timidity to open the door so wide for unfamiliar eyes. Only a few private remarks have been omitted.

W.H.

Delft, Holland, May 24, 1978

Saturday, 11/23/74

Right after 500 meters or so I made my first stop near the Pasinger Hospital, from where I wanted to turn west. With my compass I gauged the direction of Paris, now I know it. Achternbusch had jumped from the moving VW van without getting hurt, then right away he tried again and broke his leg; now he is lying in Ward 5.

The Lech River, I said to him, that will be the problem, with so few bridges crossing it. Would the villagers row me across in a skiff? Herbert shall tell my fortune, from cards as tiny as a thumbnail in two rows of five, but he doesn't know how to read them because he can't find the paper with the interpretations. There is The Devil, with The Hangman in the second row, hanging upside down.

Sunshine, like a day in Spring, that is The Surprise. How to get out of Munich? What is going on in people's minds? Mobile homes? Smashed-up cars bought wholesale? The car wash? Meditating upon myself makes one thing evident: the rest of the world is in rhyme.

One solitary overriding thought: get away from here. People frighten me. Our Eisner must not die, she will not die, I won't permit it. She is not dying now because she is not dying. Nòt now,

no, she is not allowed. My steps are firm. And now the earth trembles. When I move, a buffalo moves. When I rest, a mountain reposes. She wouldn't dare! She mustn't. She won't. When I'm in Paris she will be alive. She must not die. Later, perhaps, when we allow it.

In a rain-sodden field a man catches a woman. The grass is flat with mud.

The right calf might be a problem, possibly the left boot as well, up front on the instep. While walking so many things pass through one's head, the brain rages. A near-accident a bit further ahead. Maps are my passion. Soccer games are starting, they are chalking the center line on plowed fields. Bavarian soccer pennants are wavering at the Aubing (Germering?) transit station. The train swirled up dry paper behind it, the swirling lasted a long time, then the train was gone. In my hand I could still feel the small hand of my little son, this strange little hand whose thumb can be bent so curiously against the joint. I gazed into the swirling paper and it gave me a feeling that wanted to rip apart my heart. It is nearing two o'clock.

Germering, tavern, children are having their first communion; a brass band, the waitress is carrying cakes and the regular customers are trying to swipe something from her. Roman roads, Celtic earthworks, the Imagination is hard at work. Saturday afternoon, mothers with their children. What do children at play really look

like? Not this way, as in movies. One should use binoculars.

All of this is very new, a new piece of life. A short while back I stood on an overpass, with part of the Augsburg freeway beneath me. From my car I sometimes see people standing on the freeway overpasses, gazing; now I am one of them. The second beer is heading down to my knees already. A boy stretches a cardboard barricade between two tables with some string, fastening it on both ends with scotch tape. The regulars are shouting "Detour"; who do you think you are, the waitress says, then the music starts playing very loudly again. The regulars would love to see the boy reach under the waitress' skirt, but he doesn't dare.

Only if this were a film would I consider it real.

Where I'm going to sleep doesn't worry me. A man in shiny leather jeans is going East. "Katharina", screams the waitress, holding a trayful of pudding level with her thighs. She directs this toward the south, that is what I pay attention to. "Valente", one of the regulars screams back. His cronies are delighted. A man at a side table whom I took for a farmer suddenly turns out to be the innkeeper, with his green apron on. I am getting drunk, slowly. A nearby table is irritating me more and more with its cups, plates and cakes laid out, but with absolutely no one sitting there. Why doesn't anybody sit there? The coarse

salt of the pretzels fills me with such glee I can't express it. Now all of a sudden the whole place looks in one direction, without anything being there. After these last few miles on foot I am aware that I'm not in my right mind, such knowledge coming from my soles. He who has no burning tongue has burning soles. It occurs to me that in front of the tavern was a haggard man sitting in a wheelchair, yet he wasn't paralyzed, he was a cretin, and some woman who has escaped my mind was pushing him. Lamps are hanging from a yoke for oxen. In the snow behind the San Bernardino I nearly collided with a stag; who would have expected a wild animal there, a huge wild animal? With mountain valleys trout come to mind again. The troops, I would say, are advancing, the troops are tired, for them the day is done. The innkeeper in the green apron is almost blind, his face hovering inches from the menu. He cannot be a farmer, being almost blind. He is the innkeeper, yes. The lights go on inside here, which means the daylight outside will soon be gone. A child in a parka, incredibly sad, is drinking coke, squeezed between two adults. Applause now for the band. The fare tonight shall be fowl, says the innkeeper in the Stillness.

Outside in the cold, the first cows, I am moved. There is asphalt around the dungheap, which is steaming, then two girls travelling on roller skates. A jet-black cat. Two Italians pushing a wheel together. This strong odor from the fields!

Ravens flying East, with the sun quite low behind them. Fields soggy and damp, forests, many people on foot, a shepherd dog steaming from the mouth. Alling, five kilometers. For the first time, a fear of cars. Someone has burned illustrated papers in the field. Noises, as if church bells were ringing from spires. The fog sinks lower; a haze forms. I am stock-still between the fields. Mopeds with young farmers are rattling past. Further to the right, towards the horizon, there are many cars because the soccer match is still in progress. I hear the ravens, but a denial is building up inside me. By all means, do not glance upwards! Let them go! Don't look at them, don't lift your gaze from the paper! No, don't! Let them go, those ravens! I won't look up there now! A glove in the field, soaking wet, and cold water lying in the tractor tracks. The teenagers on their mopeds are moving towards death in synchronized motion. I think of unharvested turnips but, by God, there are no unharvested turnips around. A tractor approaches me, monstrous and threatening, hoping to maul me, to run me over, but I stand firm. Pieces of white styrofoam packing to my side give me support. Across the plowed field I hear faraway conversations. There is a forest, black and motionless. The transparent moon is halfway to my left, that is, towards the South. Everywhere still, some single-engine aircraft take advantage of the evening before the Goon comes. Ten steps further: The Business that Stocketh

About in the Dark will come on Saint Oblivious' Day. Where I am standing lies an uprooted, black and orange signpost; its direction, as determined from the arrow, is Northeast. Near the forest utterly inert figures with dogs. The region I'm traversing is infested with rabies. If I was sitting in the soundless plane right above me, I would be in Paris in one and a half hours. Who is chopping wood? Is that the sound of a church clock? So, now, onward.

How much we've turned into the cars we sit in, you can tell by the faces. The troops rest with their left flank in the rotting leaves. Blackthorn presses down upon me; as a word, I mean: the word *blackthorn*. There, instead, lies a bicycle rim entirely devoid of inner tube, with red hearts painted on around it. At this curve I can also tell by the tracks that the cars have lost their way. A woodland inn wanders past, as big as a barrack. There is a dog—a monster—a calf. At once I know he will attack me, but the door flies open, and silently the calf passes through it. Gravel enters the picture and then gets under my soles, before which one can see movements of the earth. Pubescent maidens in miniskirts are getting set to climb onto other teenagers' mopeds. I let a family pass me by, the daughter is named Esther. A cornfield in winter, unharvested, ashen, bristling, and yet there is no wind. It is a field called Death. I found a white sheet of homemade paper, soaked with moisture on the ground, and

I picked it up, craving to decipher something on the side that is turned toward the wet field, Yes, IT would be written. Now that the sheet seems blank, there is no disappointment.

At the Doettelbauer's everybody has locked up everything. A roadside beer crate with empty bottles waits for delivery. If only the shepherd dog—that is to say, the Wolf!—wasn't so hot for my blood, I could use the kennel for the night, since there is straw in it. A bicycle comes, and with each full turn, the pedal strikes the chain guard. Guard rails next to me, and above me, electricity; now it passes over my head crackling from the high voltage. This hill here invites No One to Nothing. Below me, a village nestles in its own lights. Far to the right, almost silent, there seems to be a busy highway; conical light, not a sound.

How I was frightened; outside of Alling, I broke into a chapel, sure that I could sleep there, but inside I found a woman praying with her St. Bernard dog. Two cypresses in front let my fright pass through my feet into the bottomless pit. In Alling not a single tavern open; I poked about the dark cemetery, then the soccer field, then a building under construction where window fronts are secured with plastic covers. Someone notices me. Outside of Alling a matted spot—peat huts, it appears. I startle some black birds in a hedge, a large terrified swarm that flies recklessly into the darkness ahead of me. Curiosity guides me

to the right place, a weekend cottage, garden closed, a small bridge over the pond, barred. I do it the direct way I learned from Joschi: first a shutter broken off, then a shattered window and, here I am, inside. A bench along the corner walls, thick ornamental candles, burning yet; no bed, but a soft carpet; two cushions and a bottle of undrunken beer. A red wax seal in a corner. A tablecloth with a modern design from the early fifties. On top of it is a crossword puzzle, one-tenth solved with a great deal of effort. The scribbling inside the margin reveals that every verbal resource had been tried. Solved are: head covering? hat, sparkling wine? champagne, call box? telephone. I solve the rest and leave it on the table as a souvenir. It is a splendid place, far beyond harm's way. Ah yes, oblong, round? it says here, vertical, four letters, ends with L in telephone, horizontal; the solution has not been found, but the first letter, the first square is circled several times with a ballpoint pen. A woman who was walking down the dark village road with a jug of milk has occupied my thoughts ever since. My feet are fine. Are there trout, perhaps, in the pond outside?

Sunday, 11/24

Fog outside, so icy cold that I can't describe it. A membrane of ice swims on the pond. The birds wake up, noises. On the landing my steps sound so hollow. I dried my face in the cottage with a towel that was hanging there; it reeked so bitterly of sweat that I'll carry the stench around with me all day long. Preliminary problems with my boots, still so new that they pinch. I tried using some foam and, with every movement wary like an animal, I think I possess the thoughts of animals as well. Inside, next to the door hangs a chime, a set of three small goatbells with a tongue in the middle and a tassel for pulling. Two nut bars to eat; perhaps I'll reach the Lech today. A host of crows accompanies me through the fog; a farmer is transporting manure on a Sunday; cawing in the fog. The tractor tracks are deeply embedded. In the middle of a courtyard there was a flattened gigantic mountain of wet and filthy sugar beets. Angerhof: I have lost my way. All at once, Sunday bells from several villages in the fog, most likely the start of church services. Still the crows. 9 o'clock.

Mythical hills in the mist built from sugar beets line the path through the field. A hoarse dog. I think of Sachrang as I cut off a piece from the beet and eat it. It seems to me the syrup has a lot of foam on top, the taste brings back the memory. Holzhausen: the road emerges. By

the first farm house, something harvested is covered with a plastic tarp anchored with old tires. You pass a lot of discarded trash as you walk.

A brief rest near Schoengeising along the Amper River; matted countryside, meadows at the edge of a forest rimmed with rifle ranges. From one rifle range you can see Schoengeising; the fog clears, jays appear. In the house last night I peed into an old rubber boot. A hunter, with a second hunter nearby, asked me what I was looking for up there. I said I liked his dog better than him.

Wildenroth, "The Old Innkeeper" tavern. Followed the Amper past empty wintry weekend cottages. An elderly man, enveloped in smoke, stood by a dwarf pine filling the house of a titmouse with food. Smoke rising from the chimney of his cottage. I greeted him and hesitated before asking if he had some hot coffee on the stove. At the entrance to the village, I saw an old woman, small and bow-legged, madness etched across her face; she pushed a bicycle, delivering the Sunday paper. She stalked the houses as if they were The Enemy. A child wants to play pickup sticks with plastic straws. The waitress herself is eating right now and here she comes, chewing.

A harness hangs in my corner and within it a red streetlight is mounted for lighting, a loudspeaker above. Zither music and yodelled "Hollereidi", my beautiful Tyrol comes from on high.

A cold mist rises from the plowed broken fields. Two Africans, deeply engrossed in conversation, were walking in front of me making thoroughly African hand gestures. To the very end, they didn't notice I was behind them. The most desolate thing was the palisades of Hot Gun Western City, here in the Middle of the forest, all dreary, cold, void. A railway that will never run again. The journey is getting long.

For miles across open fields I followed two teenage village beauties along a country road. They were a little slower than I, one of them in a miniskirt with a handbag, and after several miles I steadily drew close to them. They saw me from far away, turned around, quickened their pace, then stepped a bit slower again. Only when we were within reach of the village did they feel safe. When I overtook them I had the feeling they were disappointed. Then a farmhouse at the edge of town. From a distance I could see an old woman on all fours; she wanted to get up but couldn't. I thought at first she was doing something like pushups, but she was so rigid she couldn't get up. On all fours she worked her way to the corner of the house, behind which were people who belonged to her. Hausen, near Geltendorf.

From a hillock I gaze across countryside that stretches like a grassy hollow. In my direction, Walteshausen, a short way to the right, a flock of sheep; I hear the shepherd but I can not

see him. The land is bleak and frozen. A man, ever so far away, traverses the fields. Phillipp wrote words in the sand in front of me: Ocean, Clouds, Sun, then a word he invented. Never did he speak a single word to anyone. In Pestenacker, the people seem unreal to me. And now the question, where to sleep?

Monday, 11/25

Night, near Beuerbach in a barn, the ground level serves as a shelter for the cows, the earth is like clay and deeply trampled down. Up above it is passable, only the light is missing. The night seemed long, but it was warm enough. Outside, deep clouds sweep by, it is stormy, everything seems gray. The tractors have their headlights on, even though there is light enough. After precisely one hundred meters, a roadside shrine with little pews. What a sunrise behind me. The clouds had split open a crack, a sun like that rises bloodied on the day of Battle. Meager leafless poplars, a raven flying although missing one fourth of his wing, which means rain. Beautiful dry grass around me, rocking itself in the storm. Right in front of the pew, a tractor track in the dirt. A village, dead silent, telling of deeds done from which it refuses to wake. The first traces of blisters on both heels, especially the right one; to

put on my shoes requires a great deal of care. I must get as far as Schwabmuencben, for band-aids and money. The clouds are drifting against me. My God, how heavy the earth is from the rain. Turkeys scream with alarm from a farmhouse behind me.

Outside of Klosterlechfeld. Now I can see that the Lech would be no problem, even without a bridge. The terrain reminds me of Canada. Barracks, soldiers in huts of corrugated iron, bunkers from the Second World War. A pheasant took off just three feet in front of me. There is fire from a tin oil drum. A deserted bus stop, children have emblazoned it with colored chalk. Part of a wall made of corrugated plastic is banging in the wind. A sticker here notifies us that the power will be turned off tomorrow, but for a hundred meters around me there is nothing electrical to be seen. Rain. Tractors. The cars still have their lights on.

Raging storm and raging rain from the river Lech to Schwabmuenchen, nothing noticed but this. In the butcher's shop I stood waiting for ages, brooding Murder. The waitress in the inn understood it all in a glance, which did me good, so now I'm feeling better. Outside a radio patrol car and police, I'll make a long detour around them later. While changing my large bill in the bank, I had a definite feeling the teller would sound the alarm at any moment, and I know I would have run instantly. All morning I was

ravenously hungry for milk. From now on I have no map. My most pressing needs: band-aids and a flashlight.

When I looked out the window, a raven was sitting with his head bowed in the rain, and he did not move. Much later he was still sitting there, motionless and freezing and lonely, wrapped in his raven's thoughts. A brotherly feeling flashed into me and loneliness filled my breast.

Hail and storm, the first gust nearly knocking me off my feet. Blackness crept forth from the forest and, at once I thought, this will not end well. Now the stuff is turning into snow. On the wet road I can see my reflection below me. For the past hour, continual vomiting, only little mouthfuls, from drinking the milk too fast. The cows here break into a gallop quite unexpectedly. Refuge in a bus stop made of rough stained wood, open to the West, the snow blows into the most distant corner where I am. Along with the storm and snow and rain, leaves are swirling as well, sticking to me and covering me completely. Away from here, onward.

A brief rest in a stretch of woodland. I can look into the valley, taking the short cut over wet slushy meadows; the road here makes a wide loop. What a snowstorm; now everything is calm again, I am slowly drying out. Mickenhausen ahead of me, wherever the hell that is. Raindrops are still falling from the fir trees to the needle-covered ground. My thighs are steaming like a

horse. Hill country, lots of woodland now, everything seems so foreign to me. The villages feign death as I approach.

Just before Mickenhausen (Muenster?) I turn further West following my instincts. Blisters on the balls of my toes give me so much trouble, that I cannot believe walking can hurt so much. High upon a telephone pole a repairman was hanging by his straps undaunted, shamelessly staring down at me, the Man of Sorrows, entrusting his weight to the taut strap while smoking a pipe. His glance followed me for a long time as I crept past below. Suddenly I stood rooted by my feet, then turned on my heel and stared back. All at once a cave in the craggy slope behind me howled down to the sea with its mouth wide open. The rivers streamed convergently to their end in the sea, with the Grotesque also crowding on the coast, just like every where else on this Earth. Overwhelming all was a sudden, strange, other-wordly whistling and whining from gliders circling over the slopes. Further on, towards the rising sun where the thunder of faraway guns was rumbling, a radar on a mountaintop, mysterious and forever taciturn, like a huge eavesdropping ear, yet also emitting shrieks that no one can hear, reaching into fathomless space. Nobody knows who built the station, who runs it, to whom it addresses itself. Does the repairman strapped to the pole have something to do with it? Why is he staring after me like that?

The radar station is often shrouded in clouds, then they scatter and the sun goes down, days passing as I stand here, and still the station glares fixedly at the ultimate edges of the universe. Over the mountain forest outside of Sachrang, in the last days of the war, an airplane dropped a metal device that was observable in the treetops by its flag. We children were certain the flag was wandering from tree to tree, that the mysterious device was moving forward. During the night some men went off and when they returned at daybreak, they refused to divulge information concerning what they had found.

Beautiful hilly countryside, a great deal of forest, all is still. A hawk screeches. On the prayer cross behind me is written: Ere night falls, all can swiftly change/ And have a different face from early morn./ On earth a restless stranger was I born/ In mortal danger, though in the midst of life./ Through Christ's blood for me my God pray send/ Some good end to all this strife./ Our time is high, Eternity draws nigh. I noticed that the road turned more and more to the south, thus I left it and walked cross-country. Kirchheim then, around a forest, dusk approaching, Obergessertshausen: no break, since it is almost totally dark. I am rambling more than walking. Both legs hurt so much that I can barely put one before the other. How much is one million steps? I stumble forward in the darkness towards Haselbach, I can see something up the

hill, but it turns out to be just a thoroughly filthy shelter for cows. The ground is trampled by hooves knee-deep in wet clay, my feet immediately collect pounds of heavy sticky clods of earth. On a rise before Haselbach are two vacation homes, the prettier of which I break into without causing any damage. Remnants of a feast inside that could not have occurred too long ago. A pack of cards, an empty beer mug, the calendar showing November. Outside there is a storm and inside there are mice. How cold it is!

Tuesday, 11/26

Things are somewhat clearer now after having bought a Shell Oil map in Kirchheim. During the night there was a bad storm, in the morning snow was melting everywhere, its edges in tatters. Rain, snow and hail, those are the Lower Orders. Upon closer scrutiny, the hut contained a flail and pitchfork on the walls giving it a rustic touch, plus walking sticks covered with emblems, pitchforks forming a cross, and a calendar with the Playmate of the Month for September. Above the window were photo booth portraits of the inhabitants that reminded me a lot of people like Zef and The Limp. The man at the gas station gave me such an unreal look that I rushed to the john to convince myself in front of the mirror that I was still looking human. So what—I'll

let the storm blow me around the gas station until I get wings. Tonight I'll be King of the house I break into next, my castle. Once set in motion, a kitchen alarm clock intones a great Last Judgment. The wind worries the woods outside. This morning Night was drowned on cold gray waves. The cigarette packages on the roadside fascinate me greatly, even more when left uncrushed, then blown up slightly to take on a corpse-like quality, the edges no longer so sharp and the cellophane dimmed from inside from the dampness forming water droplets in the cold.

Lotte Eisner, how is she? Is she alive? Am I moving fast enough? I don't think so. The countryside is so empty, the same forsaken sense as during that spell in Egypt. If I actually make it, no one will know what this journey means. Trucks drive by in dreary rain. Kirchberg—Hasberg—Loppenhausen, a place which deserves no comment. Lastly, towards the west, a small colony of shacks, all quite provisional, as if gypsies were living there after having settled only half-heartedly. I look further on through the forest. The fir trees sway against each other, crows are rushing against the strong wind, making no headway. Upon long stalks of grain a whole community has been built, on each stalk, a house. The houses waver majestically atop their stalks, the entire community swinging and swaying. The hawk sustains itself against the wind above the fir trees, remaining in one spot, then it

is borne aloft and changes its course. A roebuck jumped across the road and slipped on the asphalt as if it was a polished parquet floor. It is very cold, ahead of me some snow has fallen, yet a little left in the flattened grass. A branch grown through a tree trunk caused me to lose my composure, plus the barking of dogs from some dead village. How I long to see someone kneeling before the roadside crosses! Low-flying airplanes overhead all day, one of them coming so close once that I think I saw the pilot's face.

Kettershausen: a great effort to get that far, and such deep exhaustion inside me. No more thoughts. Wasn't there an old pensioner on a leather sofa in an inn who warmed his beer with a beer warmer? Wasn't the red-faced innkeeper close to having a stroke? I can hardly understand the dialect around here. Matzenhofen, Unterroth, Illertissen, Voehringen.

Wednesday, 11/27

Voehringen, spent the night in an inn. In the morning, right away, I bought band-aids and pale brandy for my feet. Outside, there is a wild snowfall; staring forever into the flakes, I saw a procession of nuns together with high school students, sauntering with arms around each other's shoulders and hips, thus demonstrating ostentatiously that this meant nothing, that the

nuns are modern in their thinking nowadays. The entire arrangement smacked of bogus gaiety and insouciance, while reeking of hypocrisy. One of the nuns displayed a tattooed eagle on her low-cut neckline which extended from one shoulder blade to the other. Then I saw Wolfgang from behind on Amalienstrasse, recognizing him at once. He was thinking with such intensity that he metered his thoughts with vehement gestures, as if he was speaking. He vanished in a flurry of snowflakes which were advancing towards me from an abandoned house.

A bridge spanning the Iller, a path in the direction of Beuren through a forest, all at once a vast clearing. Everywhere the forest was staring, vast and black and deathly, rigidly still. From the pit of the woods came the screech of a buzzard. Beside me a water-filled ditch, the long grass within flattened down. The water is so transparent that I wonder why the ditch hasn't frozen over. I kicked a bit of frost upon it with my boot and, there was a thin layer of ice on top after all, as transparent as an aquarium's wall. A loneliness like this has never come over me before. In the forest a little further on was a chapel at a crossroads. The steps led directly into a puddle of ice-clear water, on the bottom of which lay dirty oak leaves. What a stillness surrounded me.

Earthworms on the asphalt road have tried to flee from the frost. They are all very thin and stretched out. A nuthatch was tapping on a tree

and I stood there awhile listening to him, as it soothed me. A little further on, in the loneliest spot, the very loneliest spot, I saw a fox. The tip of his tail had turned white. Schwuepflingen—Bihalfingen—I sit in a covered bus stop while the school nearby is having a recess. A child approached, saluted, then ran away. In passing, the priest has a word for me. The children are devoured by the school. Sparrows are melting from the roof in drops. There are still some frozen apples in the naked trees uphill.

Laupheim, train station restaurant: I bought a "Sueddeutsche" newspaper, having no idea what's going on in the world. It affirmed that today is only Wednesday, as I'd had my doubts. Untersulmetingen, then through the forest, a quiet forest with clover leaves on the snowy-wet ground. While I was taking a shit, a hare came by at arm's length without noticing me. Pale brandy on my left thigh which hurts from my groin downwards with every step. Why is walking so full of woe? Since no one else encourages me, I encourage myself. Bockighofen—Sontheim—Volkertsheim. In Sontheim, a policeman who saw me made a wry face and checked me. Spending the night is going to be difficult, the area is bad. Industry, smells of sewage, silo fodder and cow dung.

Thursday, 11/28

Beyond Volkertsheim I spent the night in a barn, all around there was nothing else, and so I stayed, although it was only four-thirty. What a night. The storm raged so that the whole shack, which was solidly built, began to shake. Rain and snow came sprinkling in from the rooftop and I buried myself in the straw. Once I awoke with an animal sleeping on my legs. When I stirred it was even more frightened than I was. I think it was a cat. The storm grew so fierce that I can't recall having experienced anything like it. A black morning, gloomy and cold, a morning that spreads itself over the fields like a pestilence, as only after a Great Calamity. The side of the shed facing the wind is piled high with snow, the fields are a deep black with white lines of snow. The storm was so powerful that the snow never settled into the furrows. Deep sweeping clouds. The smallest heights, rising but a hundred meters higher up, have a white blanket of snow. Partridges, contrasting with the landscape only when they fly away. I have never cast my eyes upon such a gloom-laden land. The snow has drifted against the road signs and the entire surface of snow has slid down somewhat, yet it sticks. I reached the Danube near Rottennacker, the bridge there was such a landmark for me that I spent a long time looking into the water. There was a gray speckled swan fighting against the

current. He remained in one spot, unable to swim more swiftly than the current; behind him, the grating of a mill, ahead of him, water rushes abruptly down, leaving the swan just a small sphere of activity. After a period of turbulent tumbling and churning, he is forced to return to the shore. Construction trucks, dirt from tractor treads, tempestuous winds, low clouds. I suddenly find myself among school kids—school is out. At the edge of the village they scrutinize me, I scrutinize them.

Munderkingen. Again my left thigh starts acting up around the groin, making me mad, for otherwise it would be fine. Here is a county fair and cattle market, everywhere farmers in wellingtons, pig transports, cows. I bought myself a cap, a kind of storm hat, it is a bit too small and utterly repulsive. Then long underpants. Just outside of town, a small church to one side and an inhabited trailer immediately next to it. An old man came out and for a long while he bent over severely-trimmed bare rose bushes. I undressed in a corner of the church while the wind was swirling a solitary tree leaf round my head. In the distance the thunder of cannon and jet fighters, which is how my mother described the outbreak of the war. A few miles further on, a low-flying jet fighter attacked a hedge, the hedge fired back with all barrels; it was nothing but a camouflaged tank that spun about and fired while the jet fighter attacked from all angles.

Ugly road, then Zwiefalten, the beginning of the Swabian Alb, everything further up is densely packed in snow. A farmer's wife told me of the snowstorm and I kept quiet about it. Geisingen, tired humans in neglected villages who no longer expect anything more for themselves. Snowy silence, the black fields peek out bleakly once again from beneath the snow. For years the doors of Genkingen have been banging in the wind. I saw sparrows on a dungheap that has stopped steaming. Melting snow trickles into a drainage hole. The legs keep going.

Beyond Geising the snowfall starts to turn into a squall and I walk more aggressively; I'm soaked to the skin and to stop would mean I would freeze to death. In this way, at least, I can remain under steam. Wet driving snow falling intensely in front, and sometimes from the side as well. I compulsively lean into it and the snow covers me forthwith like a fir tree on the side exposed to the wind. Oh how I bless my cap. In old brown photos, the last Navajos, crouching on their horses low, wrapped in blankets, covered in rugs, moving through the snowstorm toward their doom: this image refuses to leave my mind and strengthens my resolve. The road is quickly buried in drifts of snow. In the blizzard a truck gets stuck in the muck of the field with its lights on and cannot move; the farmer standing next to it gives up, not knowing what to do. The two of us, spectres both, don't salute. Oh God, it's such

a hard march as the wind, bearing burning snow, blows biting into my face, completely horizontal. And most of the time it is all uphill, though down hill everything hurts as well. I am a ski flyer, I lay myself by the storm, bent forward, far, far, the spectators surrounding me are a forest turned into pillars of salt, a forest with its mouth open wide. I fly and fly and do not stop. Yes, they scream, why doesn't he stop. I think, better keep on flying before they see that my legs are so brittle and stiff that they will crumble like chalk when I land. Don't quit, don't look, fly on. Then a dwarfish wine grower on a tractor, then my little one listened to my chest to see if my heart was still beating. The watch I gave him is also running, he says it is ticking. I always wanted a postcard of the dam that burst near Frejus—because of the landscape. And in Vienna, when the old Danube bridge crashed down at dawn, an eyewitness who had wanted to cross said that the bridge had flattened out like an old man going to sleep. All around there are cornfields, this calls for more thinking.

My right ankle has become worse. If it goes on swelling I won't know what to do. I cut across the curves sloping downward to Gammertingen, it is getting steep and does it ever hurt. At a sharp turn my left leg suddenly tells me what a meniscus is, as heretofore I had known it only in theory. I am so dramatically wet that before entering an inn I hesitate outside for quite a long

time. But necessity forces me to surmount my worst fears. Haile Selassie was executed. His corpse was burned together with an executed greyhound, an executed pig, and an executed chicken. The intermingled ashes were scattered over the fields of an English parish. How comforting this is.

Friday, 11/29

Not a good night, therefore somewhat plaintive in the morning. Telephoned from the post office. An ugly much-frequented road to Neufra over a range of hills. A direct route cross-country is hardly possible. A terrible storm up in Bitz, everything is covered with snow. Beyond Bitz, up a forested slope, a furious flurry of snow breaks out in the forest, the flakes circling down from above like a whirlwind. I don't dare venture into the open fields any more since the snow there blows horizontally. For many years they have not had anything remotely like this, and it is not even December yet. A truck on a nearby road picks me up; it is able to advance cautiously, only at a man's pace. Together we push a stranded car out of the snow. In Trudelfingen I become aware that there is no way to proceed, the snowstorm is becoming a Madness. Tailfingen, again at an inn, I hang up my clothes. A standstill all day long, no movement, no thoughts, I have come to a

standstill. The town is awful, quite a lot of industry, cheerless Turks, just one telephone booth. Very pronounced loneliness also. The little one must be lying in bed by now clinging to the edge of his blanket. Today, I'm told, they are already showing my film at the Leopold; I do not dare believe in justice.

Saturday, 11/30

Still in Tailfingen. It all started with a tunnel where the parked cars were ticketed by the police. We drove past hollering, doing something that is not done. Once, at home, I wanted to tidy up the messy car a bit, and along the way I threw out everything, most of all, scraps of old paper. Suddenly I found two police magazines amid a pile of junk, and inside of them were two pictures of a beauty that I had never seen before. They were pictures of a land that took my breath away. But how did something like this get into a police publication? I walked in this land, walked a blissful way below a blissful group of giant trees. On the treetops above there was a blissful house, a very flat-roofed palace made of simple bark and bamboo blended together, but blissful beyond conception. Parrots screeched, then women and children screeched. Nutshells fell to the ground from some sort of nuts being eaten by someone up above. I instantly knew it was the

Cambodian palace of Lon Nol. The thought just plagued me, how was all this possible, since he had been paralyzed by a stroke. Then there was the Richthofen's mobile home parked out there, the man being D.H. Lawrence. The children were lying on the seats in front, a girl eleven, the boy ten years old. The parents were sleeping in the rear; the children get up to pee. A military vehicle silently approaches, leading a strange procession that no one is supposed to see. The children are not detected since they are standing in the shadow of some bushes. A column of wounded people is carried by on stretchers, but they are so fearfully disfigured that the population is forbidden to look at them. Nurses accompany them, holding up bags filled with intravenous fluids, and all of the wounded are linked to one another systematically forming a chain. The fluid flows from one body to the next one, and so forth. A man in the middle of the procession dies while being transported, and one of the Cambodian nurses sleeps through this. Upon discovery she is scolded because the fluid cannot pass through the dead person to the next wounded one, which is to say that the whole row after him is drying out. Then a double-decker aircraft came, an antiquated model, piloted so precisely that it lifted a handkerchief up from the ground with the tip of its wing. I manufactured napalm along with Farocki, and we experimented with it out in an open field of rubbish; we needed it urgently to

demonstrate its terror. We were seized but we lied about it. I heard crows and jumped up and ripped open the window, and a whole swarm of crows flew through near-darkness over the city. Everything is white with snow, the city is flooded with snow. The morning emerges from utter Blackness, this is not a dream. Before the big department store opens, a salesman brings the rocking horse outside on a cart and connects it with a cable to the electrical current. Everywhere the shop owners are clearing their sidewalks with shovels.

Deep snow beyond Pfeffingen; water runs down the wooded slope to the road below. It moves at the same speed that I walk, settling smoothly in strange pulsating waves. Someone has sprinkled the road with salt. A car has gone off the road down a small slope and comes to a halt at a lone apple tree. Some youngsters and a couple of farmers think it could be pulled back onto the road, but human force can not possibly accomplish that. We give it one symbolic tug.

Resolution: over Bergfelden instead of over Zillhausen. Snow descends in dense flakes without any wind, which is fine. Uphill to Burgfelden it is more and more like a fairytale, enormous beeches conjoined to form a roof, everything snowy and ever so desolate. Two elderly farmers gave me some lemonade, since their only cow had not given much milk. Resolution: take the footpath over the Schalksburg. What a trail!

First across a field in knee-deep snow, no path recognizable, then all tapers down to a narrow ridge, the path now distinctly visible. Traces of deer. Trees and bushes seem completely unreal, with even the thinnest twigs cloaked in fluffy snow. The mist disintegrates, gray and black, a village sits way below. Then I turn sharply down through the woods directly towards Frommern. Lower down it gets wetter, ugly and cold but no more snow, damp grass appears. Balingen, Frommern, all a meaningless loathsomeness compared with the footpath over the heights. Rosswangen, a rest at a bus stop. A child walks past with a milk bucket, she looks me over with such self-assurance that I dare not resist her gaze.

Then snow, snow, rainy snow, snowy rain; I curse Creation. What for? I am so utterly soaked that I avoid people by crossing the sodden meadows, in order to save myself from facing them. Confronting the villages I stand ashamed. Confronting the children I change my face to look like one of the community. In a forest near a swathe, I force open a woodcutter's wagon. There is no beer inside, just disarray, plastic helmets, protective goggles and barrels of corrosive liquid, the latter compelling me to open the window to be able to breathe. The whole place is much too small for sleeping.

Tailfingen — Pfeffingen — Burgfelden —
Schalksburg — Duerrwangen — Frommern —
Rosswangen — Dottershausen — Dormettingen —
Dautmergen — Taebingen — Goesslingen —

Irstingen — Thalhausen — Herrenzimmern — Boesingen. Now and then I turn my jacket pockets inside out, wringing out the water as I would from a wet towel. InIRSTingen there was a wedding at the tavern. Grayness and Blackness and storm clouds oppress the country. The snow lies wet on the fields, darkness comes, all lies barren, no village, no man, no hideout. At the Herrenzimmern inn it says something about lodging, but the table for the regulars is occupied, and the rest of the inn downstairs is otherwise empty. Behind the counter, a pimply paleface approximately my age. I ask about spending the night, and he studies me first from head to toe before giving an answer. He cut himself shaving in the morning; he is so pimped that out of politeness I look only at his hands. He says he will have to ask first, giving his negative judgment a head start from beyond the door. Everything is taken, he says coming in, whereas everything is free. The regulars seem to side with him in not giving someone like me a room; who knows if he has any money, a sheepishly dull face exclaims. I am too soaked to think this through.

In Boesingen I am put up in a private home; two women, a grandmother and her daughter, take me to heart immediately, and that does me good. I get peppermint tea, fried eggs, and a hot bath. The television weather report says that during the course of the day tomorrow things will improve. The older woman manufactures pink

brassieres at home, a whole heap of them is piled up in the kitchen. I wanted to sit with her and watch, but I was too tired.

Along the way I had picked up some scraps of paper from the ground, the middle section of a pornographic magazine which someone had torn to shreds. I try to recreate how the pictures might have looked, where an arm belongs, for instance, or where the tangled limbs go. It is striking how the women, though naked, are wearing loads of cheap jewelry. One woman is blond, the man has bad fingernails, the rest is just snippets of genitalia.

Sunday, 12/1

An almost toothless cat howls at the window, outside it is overcast and rainy. This is the First Advent, and in less than three days I can reach the Rhine.

For the first time some sunshine again, and I thought to myself this will do you good, but now my shadow was lurking beside me and because I was heading west, it was often ahead of me as well. At noon, my shadow, It cowered there, creepingly, down around my legs and caused me forsooth such anxiety. The snow has smothered a car, it was flat as a book, this car. Much of the snow melted during the night leaving large patches lying about, and further up the hill a shroud

of snow has formed. Vast open country, rolling hills with scattered woods in between, the fields somewhat brownish again. Hares, pheasants. One pheasant behaved like a madman: it danced, spun about, uttered strange sounds, but no mate would it woo. It ignored me as if it were blind. I could have snatched it with my hand just like that, but chose not to do so. Little brooks flowed down the sloping meadows over my trail. A spring spews up in the middle of the path, and further below the brook is as broad as a lake. Crows are battling for something, one of them falls into the water. In the wet meadow lies a forgotten plastic soccer ball. The tree trunks steam like living beings. On a bench past Seedorf I take a rest because of my groin problem; I could feel it during the night, but did not know how to position my leg. Spending the night cost twelve marks, including breakfast. Felled trees assume a silver sheen in the light, steaming. Greenfinches, buzzards. The buzzards have accompanied me all the way from Munich.

Monday, 12/2

Boesingen—Seedorf—Schramberg—Hohenschramberg—Gedächtnishaus—Hornberg—Gutach.

In Schramberg, things seemed to be still in order : fried goose at the tavern, card-players playing skat. One of them would get up when he

lost and pace back and forth amongst the tables with extreme agitation. A climb up to the fortress instead of down, then along the chain of hills to the Lauterbach Valley. Black Forest farms come into view without warning, and a completely different dialect, also without warning. I have probably made several wrong decisions in a row concerning my route, and in retrospect, this has led me to the proper course. What is really bad is that after acknowledging a wrong decision, I don't have the nerve to turn back, since I would rather correct myself with another wrong decision. But I am following a direct imaginary line anyway, which is, however, not always possible, and so the deviations are not really great . . . The forest opened into an elevated valley, then it steeply ascended past the farmhouse through wet snow to the Gedächtnishaus, beyond the height reaching the road again. An elderly woman, plump and impoverished, gathering wood, talks to me of her children one by one, where they were born, when they died. Since she is aware that I want to go on, she talks three times as fast, shortening destinies and skipping the deaths of three children, although adding them later on, unwilling to let even one fate slip away: and this in a dialect which makes it hard for me to follow what she is saying. After the demise of an entire generation of offspring, she would speak no more about herself except to say that she gathers wood everyday; I should have stayed longer.

On the way down, limping, I overtook a limping man. The road down to Hornberg is steep and I am sensitive to my knee and Achilles tendon. The tendon has swollen near the top of my heel and feels as if it is crammed into a case. In the darkness I shook the door of a lighted stable, two aged women were milking the cows, then there are two maidens, five and ten years old. The older girl was quite upset at first because she was sure, as it was later revealed, that I was a robber. But soon she grew trustful and made me tell her about the jungle, about snakes and elephants. She would probe me with trick questions to see whether or not I was telling the truth. The kitchen is shabby, the conditions depressing, but without much thought the two women have given me a corner to spend the night. One of them wondered what had become of TV-Freddy, who used to sing so beautifully, and whose guitar was his only friend. A little jet-black cat with a tiny white spot on the tip of her tail is here, and she is trying to catch flies on the walls. The older girl is learning quantitative math. I hand her my knife for the night, just in case I turn out to be a robber after all.

Through the Prech Valley, a steep ascent, hardly any cars, the sky glooms through veils of fog, moisture hovers in the air. Higher and higher up. Brown bracken sticks to the ground, bent down. Lofty woodland and deep vaporous valleys. The clouds and the fog, they snub me.

Water from the melting snow trickles everywhere as up on the summit I walk amongst the clouds, stones dripping all around. The eye is inevitably drawn to empty forms, to boxes, refuse. My feet keep going. Elzach, telephone call; shall I turn back?

First I ate a roll by a fountain and reflected upon whether I had to return. A woman and a girl were observing me from behind a curtain, they used a parakeet cage for additional cover. I stared back so unabashed that they fled. I won't turn back, I am going on. Biederbachtal, a pretty little river valley sloping slightly skyward, meadows, willow stumps, beautiful Black Forest homes; above Oberprechtal there is a beautiful, functioning mill with a waterwheel, as it was in the first grade reader.

A ladies' bicycle, nearly brand-new, was thrown into a brook, occupying my thoughts for quite some time. A crime? A prior fight? Something provincial, sultry, dramatic has taken place here I suspect. A bench painted red is half-covered with water. A cat has jumped onto the lantern above the front door of a house, and does not dare move any further, feeling she is too high above the ground. She gently sways with the lantern in the wind. The recent storm, so the newspaper says, had hurricane winds of up to 100 miles per hour in the Swabian Alb and peak gusts exceeding 80 miles per hour on the Feldberg. Now it is much milder, veiled by clouds,

like late autumn; wet, dripping water everywhere, drooping clouds, sticky grass. I saw pigs beneath some apple trees, no grass there any more, just a swamp, and the gigantic mother sows very carefully lifted one foot from the sloshy morass, then set it very softly back again and sank upon their bellies as before. I quench my thirst by drinking from rivulets that flow across the meadows. I turn to the left in Biederbach, which means to the west. Later, somehow I will try to cross the mountains. 1:30 P.M.

When I ask for directions a man, a jolly farmer, tells me to come along with him on his tractor, as he is heading up that way for a spell. I continue climbing in the misty woods all the way up to the Huehnersedel summit. One should be able to have a full view from there, yet there is nothing more than a theatrical towering of clouds. Descending through the lonely forest, toppled fir trees all across my path, the limbs dripping wet. At the border of the clouds below, all of a sudden, open fields, a valley; the hills become flatter and flatter, and I can see that basically I have made my way through the Black Forest. Melancholy clouds from the West, yet I am invaded by a delicious feeling, except for my mouth which is once more caked by thirst. Dusky desolation in the forest solitude, deathly still, only the wind is stirring. Below towards the West, the sky is an orange-yellowish hue, glooming as it would before a hailstorm, while further up it is

foggy-gray and black. Suddenly a huge red quarry, from above I can see a crater, at the bottom an excavator in the red water, rusting, useless. Beside it is a rusting truck. no one, not a soul, intimidating stillness. Uncannily, though, in the midst of all this, a fire is blazing, ignited, in fact, by gasoline. It is flickering, a ghostly fire, wind. On the orange-colored plain below I can see sheets of rain, and the annunciation of the end of the world is glowing on the horizon, glimmering there. A train races through the land and penetrates the mountain range. Its wheels are glowing. One car erupts in flames. The train stops, men try to extinguish it, but the car can no longer be extinguished. They decide to move on, to hasten, to race. The train moves, it moves into fathomless space, unwavering. In the pitch-blackness of the universe the wheels are glowing, the lone car is glowing. Unimaginable stellar catastrophes take place, entire worlds collapse into a single spot. Light can no longer escape, even the profoundest blackness would seem like light and the silence would seem like thunder. The universe is filled with Nothing, it is the Yawning Black Void. Systems of the Milky Ways have condensed into Un-stars. Utter blissfulness is spreading, and out of utter blissfulness now springs Absurdity. This is the situation. A dense cloud of flies and a plague of horseflies swirls around my head, so I am forced to flail about with my arms, yet they pursue me bloodthirstily

nevertheless. How can I go shopping? They will throw me out of the supermarket, along with the insect plague swarming around my head. A flash of lightning bolts across the black-orange sky far below me, striking Francis the Miller, of all people, dead. He whose only friend was Stormy Joe. Francis the Miller has passed away the years in a wooden shed in the attic of the farmhouse, while Francis' wife was having an affair with Stormy Joe down in the house. They nailed him in with boards and he did not resist, since they would bring him soup to eat.

Is the loneliness good? Yes, it is. There are only dramatic vistas ahead. The festering Rankness, meanwhile, gathers once again at sea.

Tuesday, 12/3

Difficulties in finding a place to spend the night. When I tried to break into a house in the dark, I lost my compass. It fell from my belt without my knowing it. I was attached to it ever since the Sahara and it was a painful loss. Up on the summit, towards evening, I met a group of men at the edge of the forest who were waiting, strangely frozen, with their backs to me; chainsaws were still sounding in the woods though it had long been quitting time. As I approached them I could see they were convicts consigned to forestry detail; they were awaiting their transportation. A

guard was with them, all were in green. I was overtaken later by several barred VW vans.

I sit by the Rhine, at the ferry crossing near Kappel, calm waters, calm weather, scarcely any people. It is hazy, I can't see the Vosges Mountains. During the night I slept in Muenshweier, in a barn in the middle of the village with a little straw left only up on top, which had been stored there, however, for at least a decade. It was so dusty, it could hardly be fluffed it up, a lousy place to sleep. There was no one in the house in front, but later somebody came, opened up and fetched some wood below me. By listening closely I could tell for sure that the person fetching the wood was old, that it was a man, a man over seventy, and that what he was fetching was wood.

Ever so many ravens are flying south. The cattle keep stamping during transport, they are restless. The Rhine seems to me like the Nanay, although there is absolutely nothing at all that could remind someone of the Nanay. I wish the ferry had taken longer coming over from the other shore, as a crossing such as this is meant for man to fully digest. With me are three or four cars, the water is light brown, no other ships are in sight. The towns here are sleeping, but they are not dead. Called M, troubles. I think a lot about Deleau, Dembo, Wintrebert, and Claude. I got the new number for Mme. Eisner. Missing: compass, flashlight battery, ointment, otherwise all is well. Very warm, sparrows

and children in Boofzheim. I say Thirst. Bought milk in a shop, the second quart today. The children here sneak into the corner stores and grab the comic books, which they proceed to read quickly while crouching in a corner where the convex mirror of the clerk can't find them. I get drunk on milk. Cocks are crowing, doors slam, sunshine, I rest on a bench in front of the church.

Flat countryside, only the crows shrieking all around me; I suddenly ask myself seriously whether I have lost my mind, as I hear so many crows but see so few. There is dead silence around me as far as I can hear, and then there is the shrieking of crows. The misty heights of the Vosges Mountains are pencilled along the horizon. On the plain below, two amusement parks; ferris wheels, a haunted house ride, a medieval castle, all utterly deserted and closed down. It looks permanent. In the second one, there is also a zoo, a pond with geese, and to the rear a pen with roebucks. Somebody is driving a load of hay on a tractor. The war memorials are my resting place. The farmers' wives talk alot with each other. The farmers are tired unto death. I am always seeing empty buses. Alright, I say, keep it going.

In Bonfeld there were kindergarten kids around me who took me for a Frenchman. Finding a place to spend the night will be difficult. On the final stretch to Barr, a few kilometers, then a woman picked me up in her car; I had no

qualms in doing so because it gave me the chance to buy a compass before the shops closed. The compass needle is suspended in liquid, but it does not have my friendship yet. Amongst the bald bare poles of the Stangen Woods, workmen have hacked off branches and built a fire, bundling all the twigs as well. The ravens continue shrieking around my head here in this town. For the first time, no pains in the legs beyond my fatigue, although now and then, perhaps, there is the left knee. The right Achilles tendon does not seem so critical any more, since I have padded the place where the back of the boot bends inward with all the foam I had, and laced the boot carefully. I have to wash my shirt and woolen jersey today, both reek so strongly of me that I have to zip up my jacket whenever I am among people. The turnover of liquids is very high: today two quarts of milk, a pound of tangerines, and shortly thereafter I was so thirsty again that my spittle was sticky, thick and white as snow. When I approach people I wipe the corners of my mouth, because I have a feeling that there is foam on them. I spat into the river Ill, and the saliva floated away like a solid cotton ball. The thirst is so great at times that I can only think in terms of thirst: the farmhouse there at the end of the road surely must have a well, and why is this pub closed today, a Tuesday, when I need a beer or a coke so badly. Tonight I shall wash the jersey; the tricot that Nuber from the Offenbach Kickers

was wearing during his farewell game. I might walk along the Aube River, somewhere I heard the Aube is good. The wit of the people here stems from settling in one place for a thousand years. I have a feeling it is better that Alsace belongs to France.

A pile of garbage on the plain does not want to leave my mind at all; I saw it from a distance and walked faster and faster, finally as if I was seized with mortal terror, I couldn't bear the thought of being passed by a car before I had reached it. Gasping from the mad race, I reached the mountain of garbage, needing quite a long time to recover from all this although the first car passed me several minutes after I had arrived. Close by was a ditch with dirty cold water and a wrecked car standing there with doors, hood, and trunk wide open. The water reached up to the windows and the engine was missing. I see ever so many mice. Not one of us has the vaguest idea just how many mice there are in the world, it is unimaginable. The mice rustle very lightly in the flattened grass. Only he who walks sees these mice. Across the fields, where the snow once was, they have dug canals between grass and snow; now that the snow is gone the serpentine traces still remain. Friendship is possible with mice.

In a village before Stotzheim I sat on the steps of a church, my feet were so tired and a sorrow was gnawing in my chest; then a window opened

in the schoolhouse next door, a child was opening it following orders from inside, and from then on I overheard a young teacher scream so harshly at the children that I hoped no one would notice that a witness to these terrifying screams was sitting below the window. I went away, although I could hardly put one foot before the other. I headed towards a fire, a fire that kept burning in front of me like a glimmering wall. It was a fire of frost, one that brings on Coldness, not Heat, one that makes water turn immediately into ice. The fire-thought of ice creates the ice as swiftly as thought. Siberia was created in precisely this manner, and the Northern Lights represent its final flickering. That is the Explanation. Certain radio signals seem to confirm this, especially the intermission signals. Likewise, at the end of the daily television programming, when the set buzzes and the screen is filled with snowy dots, it proves the same thing. Now the order of the day is: all ashtrays must be put in place and self-control maintained! Men discuss the Hunt. The waitress dries the silverware. A church is painted on the plate, from the left a path is leading up, very sedately a costumed woman is moving there, and next to her, with her back to me, a girl. I disappear with the two of them into the church. At a corner table a child is doing his homework, and often the beer is called Mutzig. The innkeeper cut his thumb days ago.

Wednesday, 12/4

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

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

A perfect morning; in perfect harmony with myself I am walking briskly uphill. The potent thoughts of ski flying make me feel light, like floating on air. Everywhere honey, beehives, and securely locked vacation homes up and down the whole valley. I selected for myself the most beautiful one and contemplated breaking in and staying the entire day, but it was too nice walking, so I continued on. For once I didn't notice that I was walking, all the way up to the mountaintop forest I was absorbed in deep thought. Perfect clarity and freshness in the air, up further there is some snow. The tangerines make me completely euphoric.

Crossroads. Badly marked from here on. Naked woodland swathes with blue smoke all about from the woodcutters' campfires. As fresh as before and, as it was this morning, dew on the grass. Practically no cars up to now, and just half of the houses are inhabited. A jet-black wolfhound glared after me unflinchingly with his yellow eyes. When some flying leaves behind me came rustling forth I knew this was the dog, even though it was chained. All day long, the most perfect solitude. A clear wind makes the trees up there rustle, the gaze travels very far. This is the season which has nothing to do with this world any more. Big flying reptiles soundlessly leave behind their vapor trails above me, heading directly west, flying via Paris as my thoughts fly with them. So many dogs, from the car one

doesn't notice them that much, the smell of the fires too, and the Sighing Trees. A shaved tree trunk is sweating off water, again my shadow cowers far in front of me. Bruno flees, at night he breaks into an abandoned ski-lift station, it must be in November. He pulls the main lever for the cable car. All night long the ski-lift runs nonsensically, and the entire stretch is illuminated. In the morning the police seize Bruno. This is how the story must end.

Higher and higher up, I have almost reached the snow-line that begins at about 2600 feet, and then, further up, the border of the clouds. Foggy wetness commences, it grows dusky and the path ends. I inquire at a farmhouse, the farmer says yes, I would have to go up through the snow and a beech forest, then I would certainly come upon the road Le Champ du Feu. The snow is half melted, hardly any footprints, at last they stop altogether. The forest is foggy-wet. I know it will be unpleasant beyond that height. The farm was called Kaelberhuetten, it is deathly still in the cloudy mist. It is impossible to know the location here, only the direction is known. When I don't reach the road, although I have apparently attained the summit, this strikes me as being odd. I stop in the dense woodland that consists of fir trees; thick fog has settled all around me. I try to discern where I made a mistake. There is no other solution possible than to head further west. As I pocket the map, it occurs to me that there is

garbage strewn about in the woods, an empty can of motor oil and other things that are only thrown from moving cars. It turns out that the road lies only thirty meters away from me, but I can only see as far as twenty meters, and clearly, just a few steps. Following the road northward in the densest fog I hit a strange circular outpost with an observation tower in the center resembling a lighthouse. Stormy winds, intense wet fog, I take out my storm cap and talk out loud, since all of this is barely believable after such a morning. Now and then I can see three white lines on the road in front of me, never any further, sometimes just the closest one. The big decision: follow the road north or south? It later turns out that both ways would have been correct, because I had been walking westward between two little roads. One leads over Bellefosse to Fouday, the other down to Belmont. Steep slopes and slashing wind, empty ski-lifts. I can hardly see my hand before my face; this is no proverb, I can scarcely see it. Hath this brood of adders venom? Aye, thou speaketh sweete, whilst thou art wicked withal. I yearned to kindle a fire; I would love no thing more than to see it already ablaze. T'would fill mine heart with dread lest thou bereath salt unto me. Meanwhile it has gotten stormy, the tattered fog even thicker is chasing across my path. Three people are sitting in a glassy tourist cafe between clouds and clouds, protected by glass from all sides . Since I don't see any

waiters, it flashes through my brain that corpses have been sitting there for weeks, statuesque. All this season, the cafe has been unattended. Just how long have they been sitting here, petrified like this? Belmont, a Nothing of a province. The road was thirty-five hundred feet high, leading down now snake-like by a brook. Lumberjacks again, smoking fires again, then at 2300 feet the clouds suddenly blow away, yet below them a cheerless drizzle starts to fall. All is gray, devoid of people, downhill beside a damp forest. At Waldersbach, a nothing of possibility to break into something, so I accelerate, to find some place in Foudu before nightfall. As there are hardly any possibilities even there, I decide to force open a tavern, a big one, that is locked on all sides and poised in the center of town between two inhabited houses. Then a woman came, didn't say a word and stared at me, so I didn't do it.

Outside of town I go to eat at a truck stop, a young couple with something strange and oppressive lurking about them, as in a western, enters the restaurant. At the next table a man has fallen asleep over his red wine, or is faking sleep, and lurking as well? The little dufflebag I've carried most of the time over my left shoulder, and which rests on my hip, has worn a fist-sized hole into the sweater under my jacket. I have hardly eaten anything all day, just tangerines, some chocolate and water from streams which I drank

in animal posture. The meal must be ready now; there will be rabbit and soup. At an airport, a mayor has been beheaded by a helicopter as he stepped off. A truck driver, with lurking eyes, wearing worn-out slippers withdraws an extremely mis-shapen Gaulois, he smokes it now without straightening it out. Because I am so lonely, the stout waitress lends me an inquisitive word over the lurking silence of the men. The exposed root of the philodendron in the corner has sought tentative support in the radio loudspeaker. A small porcelain Indian figurine stands with his right hand lifted towards the sun, and his left hand buttressing the arm that is pointing up; it is a stately little statue. In Strasbourg, films by Helvio Soto and Sanjines are showing two or three years late, but showing nevertheless. Someone at a table near the counter is called Kaspar. A word at last, a name!

Searching below Fouday for a place to spend the night, already it was densely dark and damp and cold. My feet weren't working any more either. I break into an empty house, more with force than with cunning, although another house that is inhabited is right nearby. In this one workers seem to be repairing something. Outside a storm is raging as I sit in the kitchen like an outlaw, burnt out, tired and drained of all sense, I sit here because there is a wooden shutter that allows me to switch on a little light without the glow escaping outside. I will sleep in the nursery

since it is the best place to flee from in case somebody living here does in fact come home. Most surely workmen will come early in the morning; the floors and walls in some rooms are being redone, and they have left behind their tools, shoes, and jackets overnight. I get drunk on some wine that I bought at the truck stop. Out of sheer loneliness my voice wouldn't work so I merely squeaked; I couldn't find the correct pitch for speaking and felt embarrassed. I quickly split. Oh what howling and whistling around the house, how the trees are jeering. Tomorrow I have to get up very early, before the men arrive. In order to awaken by the morning light, I will have to leave the outside shutter open, this is risky because the broken window will be visible. I have shaken the glass splinters from the blanket; adjacent is a crib, plus toys and a chamber pot. All of this is senseless beyond description. Let them find me here sleeping in this bed, those feeble-minded masons. How the wind outside is worrying the forest.

Around three o'clock I arose in the night and went out to the little porch. Outside there was a storm and heavy clouds, a mysterious and artificial sort of scenery. Behind a stretch of countryside, the faint glow of Fouday was glimmering strangely. A sense of utter absurdity. Is our Eisner still alive?

Thursday, 12/5

Set out very early in the morning. The alarm clock I had found in the house I left behind ticked so treacherously loud that I climbed back inside, retrieved it and threw it a bit further away into some underbrush. Right after Fouday the most awful downpour began, rain mixed with hail, the black clouds threatening evil. I took shelter under a tree in the lingering morning gloom. Below me the road, and beyond the brook some railroad tracks. Is that ever dismal. A little further on it really gets serious. I crouched above the road beneath the fir trees, my poncho drawn around me, but that hardly helps any more. Trucks are humming past without seeing me, the animal, under the branches. A multi-colored trail of oxidized gasoline runs uphill. A very intense rainfall. I pretend to blend into the forest. Then a farmer on a moped tried to figure me out. He stopped short, looked at me oddly and said Monsieur, nothing more. When I gaze upon the fir trees, how they sway into each other, worried by the storm into slow-motion trembling and grinding movements, I get dizzy; a single glance is all it takes, and suddenly I am about to faint in the middle of the road. An orchestra appears but doesn't play, because it is haplessly entrapped with the audience in a discussion about the Decline of Music. There is a long table and a musician has taken a seat up front.

He is utterly absent-minded, running his fingers through his hair so peculiarly and pathetically that my urge to laugh becomes so strong that my stomach aches. A rainbow before me all at once fills me with the greatest confidence. What a sign it is, over and in front of he who walks. Everyone should Walk.

Memorial plaques in Le Petit Raon for those deported by the Gestapo—196 people, they comprised at least half the village. For quite some time I studied the plaques without realizing that from a stairway close by, a young woman was studying me. If the municipal hall had been open I would have asked what had happened there.

In Senones there is an incredible church. In the cafe opposite it there were voices, I went there, ordered coffee and a sandwich, surrounding me, the youthful village loiterers lounged. One of them played pool so poorly that he cheated, even though he was alone. A timid Algerian who was at the table with me was unable to understand the menu and didn't dare to order. In front of the cafe a brand new Citroen is parked with a huge load of hay strapped to the roof.

In Raon l'Etape I debated for a long time whether or not it makes sense to walk on, as it would be at least 12 miles to the next town, with everything around here so drawn out. A small hotel, pretty to look at from without, decided the question: I have to wash myself properly again. Called Munich at the post office. This time the

news was somewhat better. The last stretch here, one big truck followed another, which resulted in strong anxiety. The entrance to town near the train tracks and a paper mill didn't seem so inviting at first, but towards the center of town the oppressive feeling dwindled. Four youths in a bar are playing table soccer with a brute force I have never seen before. The voices are loud here, but loud in an agreeable way. Martje says there was a storm, there was hail, and she wanted to roast apples. The heels on my shoes have been obviously worn out although the soles are solid; the hole in the sweater from the dufflebag is getting bigger. Today, especially en route to Senones, I felt severe desp-. Long dialogues with myself and imaginary persons. Still some low drooping clouds over the hills. The hills are getting lower; what choice do they have, anyway? I must be careful with my right Achilles tendon, still swollen twice its size, though it doesn't feel so alarmingly inflamed any more. A boy here with a broad paratrooper's strap for a belt around his waist, which is meant to lend him a particularly tough appearance, sticks a match between his teeth with exceptional coolness and sits down between two flustered pubescent girls. One of them has painted her fingernails a rich pale blue. A woman here has nothing but gold teeth. Before I came, someone must have smoked at this table, thought from the point of the ashtray. I prepare a few French sentences. Tomorrow, if it doesn't rain, perhaps I will walk 35 miles, for once.

Friday, 12/6

The chairs in the restaurant were still standing on the tables, but I was served breakfast graciously nonetheless. Beside me in the restaurant, which was otherwise empty but for two cleaning women, the waitress herself was taking breakfast, and together we looked in the same direction, the direction of the street. I wanted to look over at her, but neither of us dared to direct our gaze at one another, for due to a secret compelling reason this wasn't allowed. She was, I am sure, under the same compelling urge. She stared rigidly ahead, the Urge urged us both. I stood in line outside some sort of kiosk at the street corner, I can see the kiosk in front of me. I stood in line to buy film enough for a whole feature film, it was Saturday, just before closing time at five o'clock in the afternoon, and I wanted to shoot the entire film on Sunday. The kiosk had all sorts of things, licorice, too. All of a sudden, the fat guy inside with the turtleneck sweater puts up the shutters precisely at five o'clock, closing down right before my very eyes, where I have been waiting on line, and he could see that I had been standing there for at least half an hour. And I do need all those Kodak boxes he has stored in his stall. Thus at once I went to the side door of the kiosk, which is so tiny that one person can barely stand upright in it; I don't want a piece of licorice, I said, I want all the film you have inside with you. Then the guy stepped out,

leaned against the wall of the house next door and said, it's five o'clock now, I am closed. With each word he made such an overdone, unheard-of, unreal gesture overhead that immediately it became clear to me that I would have time enough to buy the film on Monday. Good, I said, gesticulating with the same ghastly gestures myself, then I will come on Monday. Both of us made the ghastliest gestures to show what we thought of each other, and parted company.

Rambervilliers. As I walk the word *gruel*, which I have always liked so much, just won't leave my mind, the word *lusty* as well. Finding a connection between the two words becomes torture. To walk lustily works, and to spoon a thin gruel with a ladle also works, but *gruel* and *lusty* together does not work. A dense woodland comes to pass unflinching. Atop the peak of a mountain pass two trucks converge, the cockpits coming so close that one driver can climb over to the other one without touching the ground. Together, never speaking a word to each other, they eat their lunch. They have been doing this for twelve years, always on the same route, always at the same place, the words are exhausted but the food can be bought. The forest slowly ends here, the fierce hills, too. For many, many miles, uninhabited woods sprawl all around, woods which served as battlegrounds in the First and Second World Wars. The countryside becomes more open and spacious. An irresolute rain

drizzles down, staying at a level where it doesn't matter much. My output of sweat is prodigious, as I march lustily thinking of gruel. Everything is gray on gray. Cows loom astonished. During the worst snowstorm on the Swabian Alb, I encountered a provisional enclosure for sheep, the sheep freezing and confused, looking at me and cuddling against me as if I could offer a solution, The Solution. I have never seen such expressions of trust as I found on the faces of these sheep in the snow.

Rain, rain, rain, rain, only rain, I can't recall anything more. It has become a steady even drizzle, and the road becomes endless. No one is in the fields, an endless stretch through a forest. From their cars people have freed themselves of everything superfluous; there lies a lady's shoe, a suitcase over there, small but probably full, I didn't stop to look, and then, a whole stove. Three children in a village, respectfully keeping their distance, followed a boy carrying a water-filled plastic bag with live tropical fish inside. Even the cows here broke into a gallop before me.

Nomexy, Nivecourt, Charmes. A man took me in his car the last few miles, but after a short distance I switched over to a dilapidated van, in which empty glass bottles were rolling freely about in the back. I declined the offer of a cigarette, my body slowly warming up and steaming from the dampness. The windows of the car fog-

ged up instantly from my intense steaming, so much so that the man couldn't see any more and he had to stop to find a rag for wiping. Beside the main road to Charmes there was an exhibition of campers and mobile homes which, now that it is wintertime, were lying lonely and forsaken behind a chainlink fence. Only in one of them was there furniture and a bed, it was the showpiece of the exhibition, a huge thing right at the roadside, where the trucks always have to stop for a red light. It was elevated, as well, on a wooden platform. All the others further back were utterly bare inside, yet in the showpiece there was even a refrigerator and a bed with a bedspread, decorated with silken frills and lace. During a brief moment while no cars were stopping at the traffic light, I broke open the showpiece with a single jerk. When I went towards the bed, the entire trailer suddenly swung down like a seesaw on a children's playground, standing slightly lopsided, the front end pointing skyward. It was supported only in the fore and in the middle, not behind the bed. I was frightened and a truck driver outside at the light could see this. He drove a bit slower, glanced over but, giving me a look of complete incomprehension, drove on.

Before going to sleep, I took a stroll into town on my still-sizzling soles. There was a procession with brass bands, cherry bombs and little girls marching in parade, plus parents, children and,

behind them all, a float being towed by a tractor. On top of the float, which was surrounded by torch-bearing members of the volunteer fire brigade, Santa Claus stood tossing candy from a cardboard box amongst the children, who flew after it with such abandon that a couple of boys, diving headlong for some sweets that had been flung too far, crashed hard against a closed door. Santa himself looked so moonstruck that I almost suffered a stroke. His face is barely visible for the cotton mop of a beard, with the rest hidden by black sunglasses. About a thousand people gathered in front of the town hall, and Santa Claus sent his greetings down from a balcony. Shortly before this, the tractor had run into the wall of a house by mistake. Boys threw firecrackers between the legs of the uniformed girls who broke their ranks and scattered in all directions, regrouping in the john of a nearby bistro to pee. When Santa appeared with his sunglasses up on the balcony, I was profoundly convulsed within by a paroxysm of laughter. A few people gave me strange looks and I retreated to the bistro. While eating my sandwich I ate one end of my scarf as well, which cracked me up so much inside that the whole table started to shake, though outwardly my face gave no signs of laughter, however contorted it must have been. The waiter started staring at me, so I fled to the edge of town into the camper, into the showpiece. My right foot doesn't look too good

from the long march today. The Achilles tendon is rather irritated and remains twice its size, also a swelling around the ankle, probably because I'd been walking all day long on the left side of the asphalt road, thereby making the left foot tread level ground, whereas the right didn't really tread level ground since the road sloped a bit to let the rainwater flow down, and so it twisted a little with every step. Tomorrow I will make myself switch roadsides now and then. As long as I walked criss-cross I didn't notice a thing. The soles burn from the red-hot core in the earth's interior. The loneliness is deeper than usual today. I am developing a dialogical rapport with myself. Rain can leave a person blind.

Saturday, 12/7

I immediately pulled the covers of my display bed over my ears when I saw how hard it was raining outside. Please, not this again! Can the sun be losing every consecutive battle? It wasn't until eight in the morning that I finally set out again, already completely demoralized at that early hour. A merciless rain and humidity, and the profoundest desolation pressed down upon the land. Hills, fields, morass, December-sadness.

Mirecourt, from there onward in the direction of Neufchateau. There was a lot of traffic and

then it really began to rain, Total Rain, a lasting-forever-winter-rain that demoralized me even more because of its coldness, so unfriendly and all-penetrating. After a few miles someone gave me a lift, with the driver himself initially asking if I would like to hop in. Yes, I said, I would. For the first time in quite a while I chewed a piece of gum which the man gave to me. That bolstered my self-confidence for a spell. I rode with him more than twenty-five miles, then a stubborn pride arose in me and I got out and went on in the rain. Rain-draped landscape. Grand is just a beggarly village, but it does have a Roman amphitheater. At Chatenois, which was capital of the whole region during the time of Charlemagne, there is a fairly large furniture factory. The citizenry here is very excited because the factory owner abandoned the place by night, leaving things directionless and devoid of instructions. Nobody knows where he fled to, and they have less understanding why. The books are in order, the finances intact, but the factory owner has fled without a word.

I walked, walked, walked, walked. A beautiful fortress with fine ivy-veiled walls was standing in the distance. Even the cows were wondering about the fortress, not about me. Broad trees offered shade from the heat, and the water that trickled down everywhere was good against the sun. At the seashore below there were massive, dead ships sitting motionless. At the fortress were

only white creatures: white hares, white doves, and even the goldfish in the crystal ponds are white. And then the Incredible: the peacocks are white, they are albinos, like snow, their eyes light red. A peacock spreads its white wheel, and other peacocks sit screeching in the trees, but only now and then do they mingle their shrieking voices with the shrieking rain. I want to head a bit northward to Domremy, the house where Joan of Arc was born — that I would like to see. Wet woods alongside streams. I haven't seen any coal. I hear there is a lot of furious fighting in all the cafes.

Along the dreariest possible route towards Domremy, I can't tell if my course is correct any more, so I just let myself drift. A falling forward becomes a Walk. Strong rain at first, then only misty drizzle later. Slowly and drearily flows the river Meuse beside me. The old railway just below the river is no longer in use, the new one runs further up to the right, beyond the road. At a deserted gatekeeper's hut I couldn't go on any more. There is no roof, no windows, no door. Up on the road the cars are moving through the rain; further up, a freight train. The second story floor keeps the rain away somewhat. Wallpaper with a brick pattern hangs torn in tatters on the wall, a chimney in which nettles are withering moulders, some construction rubble on the floor. Remnants of a double bed, metal bed springs, but still I am able to sit on one end. Birds

nesting all around in the thorny, rain-drenched bushes. The railroad tracks are rusting. The wind blows through the house. The rainy mist hovers in the air like a solid object. There are glass fragments, a crushed rat and red berries in a wet bare bush in front of the open door. For the blackbirds it is once again the time before the advent of the first men in this land. No one is in the fields, absolutely no one. The thin plastic poncho rustles in the window frame so that it doesn't rain too much inside. No sound at all comes from the river, the river is slow and soundless. Neglected grass sways, wilted in the wet wind. A decaying staircase leads up to the first floor, but it will break once I step on it. Delivery trucks are outside in the rain. Where a flower bed had been in front of the house, now there are bushes and wild grass; where a fence had been there is now rusting wire. The threshold lies a step beyond the door, wet and overgrown with yellowish algae. I want to go on, hopefully I won't meet any people. Whenever I breathe, the breath goes out the door, the breath drifts swiftly free.

Harvest machinery was standing for sale by the roadside, but there were no more farmers. A flock of jackdaws was flying south, much higher in fact than jackdaws normally fly. Right nearby, in a basilica, a bucolic one, an unknown Merovingian king is buried. Out of the old gray woodland came a voice from within.

In Coussey I crossed the Meuse, following the small road to the left, then up to the basilica. I was strangely moved. Such a solemn valley and such a view, as would be found in the background of the most solemn Dutch paintings. On both sides there are hills, the Meuse wanders through the flat valley, the view east is beyond compare, all in December haze. The trees along the riverside stand in misty rain. This spot touched me, and I summoned forth some courage once again. Directly adjacent to the basilica stood a house I tried to break into, but I quit because it was too securely barred, and I would have caused such a racket that the neighbor would have heard something. At Domremy, I went inside Joan's house; so this is where she comes from, it lies right by the bridge. There is her signature, I stand before it for a long time. She signed it Jehanne, but most likely her hand was guided.

Sunday, 12/8

The land here is being carelessly killed. Children are playing around the church. During the night I was very cold. An old man crosses the bridge, unaware that he is being watched. He walks so slowly and ponderously, pausing again and again after short hesitant steps; that is Death walking with him. All is shrouded still in semi-darkness.

Low clouds, it won't be a good day. Till's wedding took place on the mountain, which was covered with snow, and I pushed Grandma up the mountain. Erika cried down from above that we should remain seated where we are. I said, first of all, we're not sitting, and secondly, where are we supposed to sit in this wet snow. An athletic shorn sheep that had strayed unto the village road approached me in the semi-darkness, bleating at me, then it lapsed back into its elastic trot. Now, as dawn approaches, the sparrows stir. The village was sluggish yesterday, like a caterpillar in the cold. Today, on Sunday, it has already become the chrysalis. Because of the frost, the earthworms unable to cross the asphalt road have burst. Underneath the eaves of tin, where one can sit outside in the summer, loneliness is crouching now, ready to spring.

Domremy—Greux—Le Roises—Vaudeville—Dainville—Chassesey: there is a rainy gloom above the hills, low and deep, but it is only drizzling, it won't be so bad. Utter loneliness, a brook and its dell are my companions. A gray heron flies in front of me for many miles, then it settles, when I come close, it flies further ahead again. I shall follow him wherever he flies. The dampness invades everything: jacket, trousers, face, hair. Droplets are dangling from barren bushes. Belladonna berries, bluish-black, have clouded over with gray from the mist. On all the trees an ice-gray lichen is growing, sometimes ivy

as well, in these endless, dense, wildly fecund, ice-gray woods. A chase echoes deeply in the interior, then hunters come along the road. A pack of hounds emerges from a van. The towns are half-deserted, half-decrepit, all forgotten. The houses are small, sunken in hoary heaps of moist ice-gray masonry.

It is slowly getting lighter, but still a dampness in the air, the landscape is gloomy and gray. In Chassesey, a truck sucks milk from cans into its tanks. A great lucid decisiveness about my fate surged up inside me. I shall reach the river Marne today. Cirfontaines is dying away, abandoned houses, a big tree has fallen across a roof, a long time ago. Jackdaws inhabit the village. Two horses are feeding on the bark of a tree. Apples lie rotting in the wet clay soil around the trees, nobody is harvesting them. On one of the trees, which seemed from afar like the only tree left with any leaves, apples hang in mysterious cluster close to one another. There isn't a single leaf on the wet tree, just wet apples refusing to fall. I picked one, it tasted pretty sour, but the juice in it quenched my thirst. I threw the apple core against the tree, and the apples fell like rain. When the apples had becalmed again, restful on the ground, I thought to myself that no one could imagine such human loneliness. It is the loneliest day, the most isolated of all. So I went and shook the tree until it was utterly bare. In the midst of the stillness the apples pommelled the

ground. When it was over, a haunting stillness grabbed me and I glanced around, but no one was there. I was alone. At an abandoned laundry I drank some water, but that was later.

I was walking on an avalanche of wet snow without initially noticing it. Suddenly the entire slope was creeping forth most peculiarly, the whole earth beneath me beginning to move. What is creeping there, I said, what is hissing there, is this some serpent hissing? Then the entire mountainside crept and hissed below me. Many people had been forced to spend the night in a stadium, and since they were sleeping almost on top of each other on steps built ever so steeply, whole human avalanches began to tumble and slide. There was no stopping for me and I ended up in a brook, a long way from Poissons, I could even tell where its source was, and so I said, this brook will bring you to the Marne. At dusk I crossed the Marne by Joinville, first across the canal, then across the river, which flows swiftly and muddily from the rain. While passing a house I saw that there was a ski race on the television. Where shall I sleep? A Spanish priest was reading mass in bad English; he sang in awful tones into the over-amplified microphone, but behind him was some ivy on the stone wall, and there the sparrows were chattering, chattering so close to the microphone that one couldn't understand the priest any more. The sparrows were amplified a hundred-fold. Then a pale

young girl collapsed on the steps and died. Someone daubed cool water on her lips, but she preferred Death.

Monday, 12/9

Yesterday was the Second Advent. The latter half of yesterday's route: Cirfontaines — Harmeville — Soulaincourt — Saily — Noncourt — Poissons — Joinville. In Joinville, a conspiracy hovers over everyone's head. As yet uncertain about the route today, probably straight towards Troyes, possibly via Wassy. The cloud situation has hardly changed since yesterday, the very same thing: rain, gloom. Noon in Dommartin le France, I ate a little. The countryside is boring, hilly, bare, plowed wet fields. In the furrows cold water has gathered, at a distance all dissolves in cloudy drizzle. It is really not rain, just sheer drizzle. The towns are still spread far apart, seldom a car. The walking is working, the going goes. I am completely indifferent as to where and how far I will walk today.

On the other side of the road, along the rim of a wet field, a huge dog strays up to me, obviously ownerless. I said woof to him, then he came forthwith and followed me. As I looked back at him several times, he didn't want to be seen, and he just trotted behind me in the roadside ditch. It went on like this for many miles. Whenever I

looked at him he would shrink in the ditch, stopping with a start indecisively. The huge dog made a sheepish face. When I walked, he walked too. Then he vanished unexpectedly, and though I looked for him for quite some time, and waited a bit as well, he didn't show up again. *Love your bed as you love yourself* was written in chalk across the wall of a house.

For how long had there been no place good enough for cowering down? I said *cower* to myself. There are but harvested fields flooded with water, and the drizzling gray clouds directly above. Stalks of corn have sucked up too much water and are rotting away, bent over. At the side of the road I was startled by heaps of slippery toadstools, colonies the size of car tires, which looked malignant, poisonous and putrid. Horses gray with age were standing motionless on watery meadows, hundreds of thousands of them, forming a cordon. Ducks in muddy farmyards. While taking a rest, I realized that sheep were staring at me fixedly from behind. They were standing in rank and file, all of this occurring near a gas station. When the station attendant eyed me mistrustfully, the sheep moved closer in formation, such closing-in became so embarrassing that I acted as if my rest had ended long ago; nevertheless I was so happy with the little stone wall from which I was able to let my legs dangle a bit, at last. For the first time I saw two tractors working in a field today, far off in

the distant mist. Since the Rhine Valley I haven't seen anyone in the fields. Christmas trees are being set up, without any decorations yet, just as they are. Finally the terrain became quite flat, to stay this way for a long time. The loneliness today stretched out ahead of me towards the west, though I couldn't see that far with my vision beclouding. I saw birds rising from an empty field, increasing ever more until the sky at last was filled with them, and I saw that they were coming from the womb of the earth, from very deep down where the gravity is. There, one can also find the Potato Mine. The road was so endless, I was overwhelmed by fright. For the past week the rain and misty-gray has made it impossible for me even to guess the position of the sun. Upon my arrival in Brienne, people started to hide at once, only a small grocery store stayed open by mistake. Then it closed too, and since then, the town has been deserted to death. Above this town sits the massive castle enclosed by a wrought iron fence. It is the insane asylum. Today I often said *forest* to myself. Truth itself wanders through the forests.

Tuesday, 12/10

Crystal clear weather for awhile, a joyful feeling upon seeing the sun, everywhere steam — steam from the Aube as if it were boiling, steam from the fields. When I look skyward while walking, I walk unaware on a curve towards the north. Right after the Aube, the steam from a field was so thick and so low above the ground that I waded through it shoulder-high. Viewed far and wide, the land is almost flat. A mangy woman chases a mangy dog out of the house. Oh my God, how I am cold, God, please make my parents old. Burro fell from the tenth floor because the balcony had holes that didn't belong there, and he was dead at once. The owner of the hotel, fearful for his good reputation, and recognizing the vastness of my pain, offered me nineteen thousand marks for my education. Education for what, I said, that is Judas' money, it won't revive a soul. The road, the shortcut to Piney, I had all to myself. Through the wall of the tool shed in which I slept I heard somebody snore, past midnight there was a brief rumble and I was wide awake, thinking for an instant I would flee. The houses and the people here are markedly different, but the villages have all seen better days. At a railroad crossing I met an old gatekeeper who is now retired, but who goes with a rag every day to the gatekeeper's hut inhabited by his successor and wipes off the inside of the

automatic switch board. They let him. Slowly the clouds reappear, still the birds make pleasant sounds. In Piney I bought milk and tangerines, and took a rest in the middle of town. Upon closer look, I realized I was sitting on the mark for some trigonometrical point.

This stretch of road is completely straight; whenever it goes uphill, it only goes towards the clouds. Immense empty fields, the cars are being drawn over the road as if something were sucking them in. Just past Piney I was stopped and checked by astonished patrolmen who wouldn't believe a word I said and wanted to take me with them right away. We only came to an understanding once the city of Munich was mentioned. I said Oktoberfest, and one of the policemen had been there and remembered the words *Glockenspiel* and *Marienplatz*, he could say this in German. After that they became peaceful. From far away, from a hilltop, I saw Troyes before me. Then some cranes flew over me in perfect formation. They flew against the strong wind scarcely faster than I was moving on foot. There were twenty-four of them, big and gray, and every so often one of them gave a hoarse cry. Whenever a gust of wind would upset their formation, some of them soared, while others who had been torn away from the unit fought back to their original position; it was magnificent how they regrouped. Like the rainbow, the cranes are a metaphor for he who walks. Beyond Troyes I could see a faint

ridge of hills, probably the far side of the Seine Valley. Then the cranes veered abruptly southeast, most likely towards the national park that is situated there. I bought a carton of milk before crossing the Seine, and drank as I sat on a railing of the bridge. The empty carton that I threw into the water will be in Paris before me. I am wondering about the smugness with which people move about. I haven't been in a big town in such a long time. I went directly to the cathedral without stopping to wonder. On throbbing feet I crept around it, and out of pure astonishment I didn't dare go in. I certainly wasn't part of the plan. I took a tiny hotel room and washed out Nuber's jersey, it no longer reeked of Nuber in his farewell game with the Offenbach Kickers, but of me. It is drying on the little radiator now. The big cities hide their dirt, with so many fat people there as well. I saw a fat man on a racing bike and a fat man on a moped with his mangy dog sitting before him on the gas tank, and I bought some cheese from a fat young shop girl who treated me like a nobleman, despite the fact that I am totally disfigured. I saw two fat children in front of a television set. The picture was distorted beyond recognition, yet they were staring at it, spellbound. At the market was a boy on crutches; leaning against the wall of a house, my feet refused to cooperate anymore. With a single brief exchange of glances we measured the degree of our relationship.

Wednesday, 12/11

All I see in front of me is route. Suddenly, near the crest of a hill, I thought, there is a horseman, but when I moved in closer, it was a tree; then I saw a sheep and was uncertain as to whether or not it would turn out to be a bush, but it was a sheep, on the verge of dying. It died still and pathetically; I have never seen a sheep die before. I marched very swiftly on.

In Troyes there had been myriad clouds chasing through the morning dimness, as it started to rain. In the obscurity I went to the cathedral, and when I, The Gloomy One, had crept around it, I gave myself a push and went inside. Inside it was still very dim; I silently stood in a forest of giants that had once gloomed ages ago. Outside, it stormed so fiercely that my poncho tore; I swung forward from stop to bus stop, seeking refuge in the covered shelters. Then I left the intolerable main route and walked parallel to it alongside the Seine. The region was very desolate, like outskirts that refuse to stop, with a few farmhouses interspersed. The electrical cables wailed and swayed in the storm; I walked a bit, bent forward to avoid being blown off my feet. The clouds were no higher than three hundred feet at most, just one big chase. Near a factory, a guard screamed at me from behind, thinking I intended to enter the premises, but I was merely keeping away from the trucks carrying the huge

fountains with them. It is impossible to walk across the fields, everything is flooded and swampy. Yonder, where the land is plowed the soil is too ponderous. Fortified by the weather, it was easier to confront faces today. My fingers are so frozen that I can write only with a great deal of effort.

All at once, a driving snow, lightning, thunder and storm, everything at once, directly overhead, so suddenly that I was unable to find refuge again. Instead I tried to let the mess pass over me, leaning against the wall of a house, halfway protected from the wind. Immediately to my right at the corner of the house, a fanatical wolfhound stuck his head through the garden fence flashing his teeth at me. Within minutes a layer of water and snow was lying hand-high on the street, and a truck splashed me with everything that was lying there. Shortly afterward, the sun came out for just a few seconds, then a torrential rainfall. I grappled forward from cover to cover. At the village school in Savieres, I debated whether I should drive to Paris, seeing some sense in that. But getting so far on foot and then driving? Better to live out this senselessness, if that's what this is, to the very end. St. Mesmin, les Gres. I didn't quite make it to les Gres, despite my escapes from the enormous black wall racing towards me. Unnoticed by anyone, I broke into the laundry room of an inhabited house. For five minutes, the Infernal reigned

outside. Birds were fighting amid thick lumps of hail blowing horizontally. In just a few minutes the whole Thing swept over me, leaving everything white, an unsteady sun twitching in pain thereafter and, beyond him, deep and black and threatening, the next wall approached. In les Gres, shaken to the soles, I ordered a cafe au lait. Two policemen on motorcycles, wearing rubber uniforms that made them look like deep sea divers, likewise sought shelter. Walking doesn't work any more. The blizzard made me laugh so hard that my face was all contorted when I entered the cafe. I was fearful the police would seize me, and so once again in front of a bathroom mirror, I quickly made sure that I still looked somewhat human. My hands are slowly getting warm again.

Walked a long way, a long way. Far off in the open fields, when another one of those stormy fits came and there was no shelter near or far, a car stopped and took me a little ways to Romilly. Then onward. I stood leaning against a house directly under a window during a hailstorm, as again there was nothing better to be found in such haste. There was an old man inside—so close I could have grabbed him with my arm—who was reading a book by the light of a table lamp. He didn't realize anything was pouring down outside, nor did he see me standing nearby, breathing breath on his window pane. My face, assessing it in a mirror again since an idea was

stirring within, wasn't altogether known to me any more. I could swim the rest of the way. Why not swim along the Seine? I swam with a group of people who fled from New Zealand to Australia, in fact I swam in front, being the only one who knew the route already. The only chance the refugees had for escape was to swim; the distance, however, was fifty miles. I advised people to take plastic soccer balls with them as additional swimming aids. For those who drowned, the undertaking became legendary before it even began. After several days we reached a town in Australia; I was the first one to come ashore, and those who followed were preceded by their wristwatches which drifted in halfway underwater. I grabbed the watches and pulled the swimmers ashore. Great pathetic scenes of brotherliness ensued on shore. Sylvie le Clezio was the only one amongst them I knew. When it started to rain very hard again, I wanted to seek shelter in a roofed bus stop, but there were already several people there. I hesitated before finally creeping over to a school for cover. The gate, which served as an entrance for cars, closed shut making some noise, and the teacher eyed me from the classroom. At last he came outside in sandals and blue overalls and invited me into the classroom, but the worst was over by then, and I was too much into the rhythm of walking to be able to rest very long. The distances I cover now are quite extensive. When I left I replaced the

iron gate in its lock very gently, so that I left without further ado. Walking endlessly up to Provins, I decided to eat prodigiously, but a salad is all I can pass down. When I have to get up now, a mammoth will arise.

Thursday, 12/12

Called Pierre-Henri Deleau, I have pulled him out of bed, he is the only one who presently knows that I am coming on foot. Nangis: perfectly straight stretch and pleasant to walk since I can trot along the roadside. Cold light snow begins to drift, then rain. It is very cold; at the edge of the snow I encountered a police roadblock which became most uncomfortable. Harvested fields, trees on the sides of the road, heaps of leftover sugar beets. In Provins, I wandered about in the morning for a long time, at least six miles in all. The will to end all of this swells up in me, but from Provins it is still 50 miles to Paris, and counting the stretch I have already covered makes it a good fifty-five miles. I won't stop walking until I am there. One night more, then another half-day. The face is burning from the cold. Last night I slept a little better, even if I have been waking up these last few days at three-thirty in the morning, and slowly, I go on my way. First I went to the upper part of Provins in the darkness and imagined what a

somber time it must have been a thousand years ago, as one can see from the buildings there. An almost-empty bus overtook me and, while passing, the driver opened the pneumatic doors to throw away his burning cigarette butt. Both doors, front and rear, opened when he did it. The driver does this from habit, he almost never has any passengers to drive, the bus is almost always empty. One day, a school kid, leaning against the rear door with her satchel, falls out. They find her hours later, because the only two passengers in the bus were seated further up front and didn't notice a thing. But it is too late, and the child dies that night. In court, the bus driver has nothing to say in his defense. How could it be, he asks day after, again and again. The sentence, incidentally, hasn't been rendered yet. My hands are as red as a lobster from the cold. I keep walking as always.

Friday, 12/13

Walked all night long, Paris perimeter. It was the day when my grandfather refused to get up from the chair in front of the door. A farmhouse was in the background, also a clothesline between a couple of rotting posts, and affixed to it were clothespins. Ducks splashed about in a small muddy hole in which water had gathered. At a

distance, a barn and a cottage, the kind they provide for retired railroad clerks. On the railroad tracks just one train a day passes through. My grandfather was sitting in his leather armchair, wrapped in a rug up to his chest. Without any explanation he refused to leave the chair from then on. Since the weather was fine, they let him have his way, later building some sort of temporary stall around him, the walls of which having been built in such a manner that one can remove them quickly and easily when it is warm again outside. The roof is nailed down with tar paper over it. Behind the grandfather, the first building past the farmhouse is the inn. All kinds of things are written on the menu, but the waitress always says, we're out of this today, and that is just finished, and there is nothing left in the way of pork, the butcher has been remiss with his deliveries. Only fish remains, the several varieties, and it has been like this every day, since the restaurant first existed. The tables are separated by aquariums, inside, carp, trout and, also, some very exotic fish are incarcerated, among them a trembling eel that is capable of giving out violent electrical shocks. But these fish are never taken out and made into dishes; it remains a mystery where the kitchen gets its fish. When I suffer from hunger, *I suffer a lot*, is inscribed across every aquarium, and when one throws crumbs into the water from above, the fish fight for them. The grandfather once let it

be known that he felt all his vertebrae were broken, with everything held together only because he was sitting in the arms of the chair. If he stood up, all would fall apart like a pile of stones. You could see this from the collar bone, and by making a circular movement with his shoulder, which he pretends isn't possible with the other side, he considers this as valid proof that his collar bone has no solid connections to the crumbled spinal column, at least not on the left side. For eleven years the grandfather sat in his armchair; then he got up, went into the inn behind his stall, ordered something to eat, ate fish, and then wanted to pay, but the money he had in his pockets had become invalid, the banknotes having been replaced years ago. The grandfather then visited his old sister, going to bed there and then refusing to leave it again. The grandmother couldn't understand this any more, but the sister could. Every day the grandmother came and tried to talk the grandfather into getting up, but he didn't want to listen. After nine months, the grandmother came just once a week instead of daily, and so it remained for forty-two years. At the time of their Golden Wedding Anniversary she came twice in one week, on two consecutive days, for the wedding date fell on the day before her regular visit. The trip was rather long, the grandmother always taking the tram. But after many years the tram was shut down, the rails ripped out of the street and a bus line

opened. Each day when the grandmother came, she carried the grandfather's boots with her to show to him, and tried to persuade him to put them on and get up. After forty-two years there was a little accident. The grandmother was shoved out of the bus by the pushing passengers, lost the plastic bag with the boots, and before she could pick them up again, the moving bus ran over the boots. What now? Before the grandmother visited the grandfather she bought a new pair of boots. When the grandfather beheld the new boots, he became curious, wondering whether they would hurt him. He put on the boots, got up, and went away with the grandmother. Two and a half years later, the grandfather died after an evening of bowling, during which he had won every game. He died because of his joy, which had simply been too much for his frail heart.

The sight of a large forest in a storm. All day long there was rain, all night long it was wet and cold, mixed with snowflakes, Over there are fragments of a mobile home, of gloves that I found, the walk through the night, the accident, the Russian reception. The hill in the city is the accumulated debris from the age of Louis XIV, at that time it was open countryside, and the filth has piled up so high that there is a regular mountain in the city today, with paved streets and skyscrapers on it.

I looked for Claude's arrow, which he had

shot into a tree trunk years ago. All this time it had been firmly stuck in the trunk, but recently it had rotted away and fallen off, he said; when he retrieved it, only the steel point was still sticking in the tree. Birds had used the arrow often as a landmark and a branch, said Claude; he would see five, six blackbirds on it sitting in a row. He claims he still has the small parched lemon he picked in In Gall from the first tree he saw after crossing the Sahara. The powder and ammunition for the hunt he produced himself, he even made the rifle himself.

In the morning I had reached the edge of Paris, but it was still a half day to the Champs Elysees; I walked there on feet so tired that I had no more consciousness left. A man wanted to walk through the forest and never appeared again. A man went for a solitary stroll on a broad beach with his big dog. He had a heart attack; since the leash was wrapped around his wrist, he was forced to walk on and on, as the dog was very rash and wanted to run. A man had a live duck in his shopping bag. A blind beggar played the accordion, his legs were covered with a zebra-striped blanket below the knee. The woman beside him was holding the aluminum cup for the money. Next to them they also had a shopping bag, out of which peered a sick dog. A sick dog attracts more money. Oftentimes my gaze strayed through a window onto a vast sandy beach. There were powerful waves, pounding

surf, and nothing but haze at daybreak. Hias says, he sees to the end of the world. We were close to what they call the breath of danger.

Several waiters took up the pursuit of a dog that had run out of a cafe. A slight incline had been too much for an old man, and he pushed his bicycle, walking heavily, limping and panting. Finally he stands still, coughing, unable to go on. On the rack behind him he has fastened a frozen chicken from the supermarket.

Must hunt for Peruvian harp music with female singer. Exalted hen, greasy soul—

Saturday, 12/14/74

As afterthought just his: I went to Madame Eisner, she was still tired and marked by her illness. Someone must have told her on the phone that I had come on foot, I didn't want to mention it. I was embarrassed and placed my smarting legs up on a second armchair, which she pushed over to me. In the embarrassment, a thought passed through my head, and since the situation was strange anyway, I told it to her. Together, I said, we shall boil fire and stop fish. Then she looked at me and smiled very delicately, and since she knew that I was alone on foot and therefore unprotected, she understood me. For one splendid fleeting moment something mellow flowed through my deadly tired body. I said to her, open the window, from these last days onward I can fly.

