

ANOTHER WORLD

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I was born in Gelderland, where our family holdings had dwindled to a few acres of heath and yellow water. Along the boundary grew pine trees that rustled with a metallic sound. The farmhouse had only a few habitable rooms left and was falling apart stone by stone in the solitude. Ours was an old family of herdsman, once numerous, now reduced to my parents, my sister and myself.

My fate, dismal enough at the beginning, became the happiest I could imagine: I met the one who understands me; he will teach those things that formerly I alone knew among men. But for many years I suffered and despaired, a prey to doubt and the loneliness of the soul, which nearly ended by eating away my absolute faith.

I came into the world with a unique constitution, and from the very beginning I was the object of wonder. Not that I seemed ill-formed; I was, I am told, more shapely in face and body than is customary in newborn infants. But my color was most unusual, a sort of pale violet—very pale, but quite distinct. By lamplight, especially by the light of oil lamps, this tint grew paler still, turned to a curious whiteness, like that of a lily submerged in water. That, at least, was how I appeared to others (for I saw myself differently, as I saw everything in the world differently). To this first peculiarity others were added which only revealed themselves later.

Though born with a healthy appearance, I developed poorly. I was thin, and I cried incessantly; at the age of eight months, I had never been seen to smile. Soon my life was despaired of. The doctor from Zwartendam declared I was suffering from congenital weakness; he could think of no remedy but a strict regimen. Nonetheless I continued to waste away; the family expected me to disappear altogether from one day to the next. My father, I think, was resigned to it, his pride—the Hollander's pride in regularity and order—little soothed by the grotesque appearance of his child. My mother, on the contrary, loved me all the more for my

strangeness, having made up her mind that the color of my skin was pleasing.

So matters stood, when a very simple thing came to my rescue. Since everything concerning me must be out of the ordinary, this event was the cause of scandal and apprehension.

A servant having left us, her place was given to a vigorous girl from Friesland, honest and willing, but inclined to drink. I was placed in her care. Seeing me so feeble, she took it into her head to give me secretly a little beer and water mixed with Schiedam—remedies, according to her, sovereign against all ills.

The curious thing was that I began immediately to regain my strength and from then on showed a remarkable predilection for alcohol. The good girl rejoiced in secret, not without drawing some pleasure from the bafflement of my parents and the doctor. At last, driven into a corner, she revealed the secret. My father flew into a violent passion; the doctor inveighed against superstition and ignorance. Strict orders were given to the servants; I was taken out of the Frieslander's care.

I began to grow thin again, to waste away, until my mother, forgetting everything but her fondness for me, put me back on a diet of beer and Schiedam. I promptly grew strong and lively again. The experiment was conclusive: alcohol was seen to be necessary to my health. My father was humiliated. The doctor got out of the affair by prescribing medicinal wines; and from that time on my health was excellent—but no one hesitated to prophesy a life of drunkenness and debauch for me.

Shortly after this incident, a new oddity grew apparent to the household. My eyes, which had seemed normal at the beginning, grew strangely opaque, took on a horny appearance, like the wing cases of certain beetles. The doctor concluded from this that I was losing my sight, but he confessed that the ailment was absolutely strange to him, of such a nature that he had never had the opportunity to study a like case. Shortly the pupils of my eyes so fused into the irises that it was impossible to tell one from the other. It was remarked, moreover, that I could stare at the sun without showing any discomfort. In truth, I was not blind in the least, and in the end they had to admit that I saw very well.

So I arrived at the age of three. I was then, in the opinion

of the neighborhood, a little monster. The violet color of my skin had undergone little change. My eyes were completely opaque. I spoke awkwardly, and with incredible swiftness. I was dextrous with my hands, and well formed for all activities which called for more quickness than strength. It was not denied that I might have been graceful and handsome if my coloring had been normal and my pupils transparent. I showed some intelligence, but with deficiencies which my family did not fully appreciate, since, except for my mother and the Frieslander, they did not care much for me. I was an object of curiosity to strangers, and to my father a continual mortification.

If, moreover, he had clung to any hope of seeing me become like other people, time took ample pains to disabuse him of it. I grew more and more strange, in my tastes, habits and aptitudes. At the age of six I lived almost entirely on alcohol. Only very seldom did I take a few bites of vegetables or fruit. I grew with prodigious swiftness; I became incredibly thin and light. I mean "light" even in its specific sense, which is just the opposite of thinness. Thus, I swam without the slightest difficulty; I floated like a plank of poplar. My head hardly sank deeper than the rest of my body.

I was nimble in proportion to that lightness. I ran like a deer; I easily leaped over ditches and barriers which no man would even have attempted. Quick as a wink, I could be in the crown of a beech tree; or, what caused even more astonishment, I could leap over the roof of our farmhouse. In compensation, the slightest burden was too much for me.

All these things added together were nothing but phenomena indicative of a special nature, which by themselves would have done no more than single me out and make me unwelcome; no one would have classified me outside humanity. No doubt I was a monster, but certainly not to the same degree as those who were born with the ears or horns of animals; a head like a calf's or horse's; fins; no eyes or an extra one; four arms; four legs; or without arms and legs. My skin, in spite of its startling color, was little different from a sun-tanned skin; there was nothing repugnant about my eyes, opaque as they were. My extreme agility was a gift, my need for alcohol might pass for a mere vice, an inheritance of drunkenness; however, the rustics, like our Frieslander servant, viewed it as no more than a confirmation of their ideas about the "strength" of Schiedam, a rather lively

demonstration of the excellence of their tastes.

As for the swiftness and volubility of my speech, which made it impossible to follow, this seemed to be confounded with the defects of pronunciation—stammering, lisping, stuttering—common to so many small children. Thus, properly speaking, I had none of the marked characteristics of monstrosity, however extraordinary my general effect might be. The fact was that the most curious aspect of my nature escaped my family's notice, for no one realized that my vision was strangely different from ordinary vision.

If I saw certain things less well than others did, I could see a great many things that no one else could see at all. This difference showed itself especially in relation to colors. All that was termed red, orange, yellow, green, blue or indigo appeared to me as a more or less blackish gray, whereas I could perceive violet, and a series of colors beyond it—colors which were nothing but blackness to normal men. Later I realized that I could distinguish in this way among some fifteen colors as dissimilar as, for instance, yellow and green—with, of course, an infinite range of gradations in between.

In the second place, my eye does not perceive transparency in the ordinary way. I see poorly through glass or water; glass is highly colored for me, water perceptibly so, even at a slight depth. Many crystals said to be clear are more or less opaque, while, on the other hand, a very great number of bodies called opaque do not interfere with my vision. In general, I see through objects much more frequently than you do; and translucence, clouded transparency, occurs so often that I might say it is for my eye the rule of nature, while complete opacity is the exception. In this way I can make out objects through wood, paper, the petals of flowers, magnetized iron, coal, etc. Nevertheless, at variable thicknesses these substances create an obstacle—as, a big tree, a meter's depth of water, a thick block of coal or quartz. Gold, platinum and mercury are black and opaque; ice is grayish black. Air and water vapor are transparent and yet tinted, as are certain specimens of steel, certain very pure clays. Clouds do not hinder me from seeing the sun or the stars. On the other hand, I can clearly see these same clouds hanging in the air.

As I have said, this difference between my vision and that of others was very little remarked by those around me. My color perception was thought to be poor, that was all; the infirmity is too common to attract much attention. It had no

importance in the small daily acts of my life, for I saw the shapes of objects in the same manner as most people, and perhaps even more accurately. Designating an object by its color, when it was necessary to distinguish it from another of the same shape, troubled me only when the two objects were new. If someone called one waistcoat blue and another red, it made little difference in what colors these waistcoats really appeared to me; blue and red became purely mnemonic terms.

From this you might conclude that there was a system of correspondence between my colors and those of other people, and therefore that it came to the same thing as if I had seen their colors. But, as I have already written, red, green, yellow, blue, etc., *when they are pure*, as the colors of a prism are pure, appear to me as a more or less blackish gray; they are not colors to me at all. In nature, where no color is simple, it is not the same thing. A given substance termed green, for instance, is for me of a certain mixed color;* but another substance called green, which to you is identically the same shade as the first, is not at all the same color to me. You see, therefore, that my range of colors has no correspondence with yours: when I agree to call both brass and gold yellow, it is a little as if you should agree to call both a cornflower and a corn poppy blue.

2.

Were this the extent of the difference between my vision and normal vision, certainly it would appear extraordinary enough. Nevertheless, it is but little compared with that which I have yet to tell you. The differently colored world, differently transparent and opaque, the ability to see through clouds, to perceive the stars on the most overcast nights, to see through a wooden wall what is happening in the next room or on the outside of a house—what is all this, compared with the perception of a *living world*, a world of animate Beings, moving around and beside man without man's being aware of them, without his being warned by any sort of immediate contact?

What is all this, compared with the revelation that there exists on this earth another fauna than our fauna, and one

* And this mixture naturally does not include green, since green, for me, belongs to the realm of darkness.

without any resemblance to our own in form, or in organization, or in habits, or in manner of growth, birth and death? A fauna which lives beside and in the midst of ours, influences the elements which surround us, and is influenced, vivified, by these elements, without our suspecting its presence. A fauna which, as I have demonstrated, is as unaware of us as we of it, and which has evolved in ignorance of us, as we in ignorance of it. A living world as varied as ours, as puissant as ours—perhaps more so—in its effect on the face of the planet! A kingdom, in short, moving upon the water, in the atmosphere, on the earth, modifying that water, that atmosphere and that earth entirely otherwise than we, but certainly with formidable strength, and in that way acting indirectly upon us and our destiny, as we indirectly act upon it!

Nevertheless, this is what I have seen, what I alone among men and animals still see; this is what I have *studied* ardently for five years, after having spent my childhood and adolescence merely *observing* it.

3.

Observing it! As far back as I can remember, I instinctively felt the seductiveness of that creation so foreign to ours. In the beginning, I confounded it with other living things. Seeing that no one took any notice of its presence, that everyone, on the contrary, appeared indifferent to it, I hardly felt the need to point out its peculiarities. At six, I understood perfectly its difference from the plants of the fields, the animals of the farmyard and the stable; but I confused it somewhat with such nonliving phenomena as rays of light, the movement of water, and clouds. That was because these creatures were intangible: when they touched me I felt no sensation of contact. Their shapes, otherwise widely variant, nevertheless had this singularity, that they were so thin, in one of their three dimensions, that they might be compared to drawings, to surfaces, geometric lines that moved. They passed through all organic bodies; on the other hand, they sometimes appeared to be halted, entangled by invisible obstacles.

But I shall describe them later. At present I only wish to draw attention to them, to affirm their variety of contours and lines, their quasi-absence of thickness, their *impalpability*, combined with the autonomy of their movements:

At about my eighth year, I became perfectly sure that they were as distinct from atmospheric phenomena as from the members of our animal kingdom. In the delight this discovery afforded me, I tried to communicate it to others. I never succeeded in doing so. Aside from the fact that my speech was almost entirely incomprehensible, as I have said, the extraordinary nature of my vision rendered it suspect. No one thought of pausing to unravel my gestures and my phrases, any more than to admit that I could see through wooden walls, even though I had given proof of this on many occasions. Between me and the others there was an almost insurmountable barrier.

I fell into discouragement and daydreams; I became a sort of little recluse; I caused uneasiness, and felt it myself, among children of my own age. I was not exactly an underdog, for my swiftness put me beyond the reach of childish tricks and gave me the means of revenging myself easily. At the slightest threat, I was off at a distance—I mocked all pursuit. No matter how many of them there were, children never succeeded in surrounding me, much less in holding me prisoner. It was not worth while even to try to seize me by a trick. Weak as I might be at carrying burdens, my leaps were irresistible and freed me at once. I could return at will, overcome my adversary, even more than one, with swift, sure blows. Accordingly I was left in peace. I was looked on as innocent and at the same time a bit magical; but it was a feeble magic, which they scorned.

By degrees I made a life for myself outdoors, wild, meditative, not without its pleasures. Only the affection of my mother humanized me, even though, busy all day long, she found little time for caresses.

4.

I shall try to describe briefly a few scenes from my tenth year, in order to give substance to the explanations which have gone before.

It is morning. A bright glow illumines the kitchen—a pale yellow glow to my parents and the servants, richly various to me. The first breakfast is being served: bread and tea. But I do not take tea. I have been given a glass of Schiedam with a raw egg. My mother is hovering over me tenderly; my father questions me. I try to answer him, I slow down my speech; he

understands only a syllable here and there. He shrugs. "He'll never learn to talk!"

My mother looks at me with compassion, convinced that I am a bit simple. The servants and laborers no longer even feel any curiosity about the little violet monster; the Frieslander has long ago gone back to her country. As for my sister, who is two years old, she is playing near me, and I feel a deep affection for her.

Breakfast over, my father goes off to the fields with the laborers; my mother begins to busy herself with her daily tasks. I follow her into the farmyard. The animals come up to her. I watch them with interest; I like them. But, all around, the other Kingdom is in motion, and it attracts me still more; it is the mysterious domain which only I know.

On the brown earth a few shapes are sprawled out; they move, they pause, they palpitate on the surface of the ground. They belong to several species, different in contours, in movement, and above all in the arrangement, design and shadings of the lines which run through them. Taken together, these lines constitute the essential part of their being, and, child though I am, I know it very well. Whereas the mass of their bodies is dull, grayish, the lines are almost always brilliant. They form highly complicated networks, radiating from centers, spreading out until they fade and lose their identity. Their tints and curves are innumerable. These colors vary within a single line, as the form does also, but to a lesser extent. The creature as a whole is distinguished by a rather irregular but very distinct outline; by the radiant centers; by the multicolored lines which intermingle freely. When it moves, the lines tremble, oscillate; the centers contract and dilate, while the outline changes little.

All this I see very well already, though I may be unable to define it; a delightful spell falls over me when I watch the *Moedigen*.* One of them, a colossus ten meters long and almost as wide, passes slowly across the farmyard and disappears. This one, with some bands the size of cables, and centers as big as eagles' wings, greatly interests and almost frightens me. I pause for a moment, about to follow it, but then others attract my attention. They are of all sizes: some are no larger than our tiniest insects, while I have seen others

* This is the name which I gave them spontaneously in my childhood and which I have retained, though it corresponds to no quality or form of these creatures.

more than thirty meters long. They advance on the ground itself, as if attached to solid surfaces. When they meet a material object—a wall, or a house—they cross it by molding themselves to its surface, always without any significant change in their outlines. But when the obstacle is of living or once-living matter, they pass directly through it; thus I have seen them appear thousands of times out of trees and beneath the feet of animals and men. They can pass through water also, but prefer to remain on the surface.

These land *Moedigen* are not the only intangible creatures. There is an aerial population of a marvelous splendor, of an incomparable subtlety, variety and brilliance, beside which the most beautiful birds are dull, slow and heavy. Here again there are internal lines and an outline. But the background is not grayish, it is strangely luminous; it sparkles like sunlight, and the lines stand out from it in trembling veins; the centers palpitate violently. The *Vuren*, as I call them, are of a more irregular form than the land *Moedigen* and commonly propel themselves by means of rhythmic dispositions, intertwinings and untwinings which, in my ignorance, I cannot make out and which baffle my imagination.

Meanwhile I am making my way across a recently mowed meadow; the battle of a *Moedig* with another one has drawn my attention. These battles are frequent, and they excite me tremendously. Sometimes the battles are equal; more often an attack is made by the stronger upon the weaker. (The weaker is not necessarily the smaller.) In the present case, the weaker one, after a short defense, takes to flight, hotly pursued by the aggressor. Despite the swiftness of their motions, I follow them and succeed in keeping them in view until the struggle begins again. They fling themselves on each other—firmly, even rigidly, solid to each other. At the shock, their lines phosphoresce, moving toward the point of contact; their centers grow smaller and paler.

At first the struggle remains more or less equal; the weaker puts forth a more intense energy and even succeeds in gaining a truce from its adversary. It profits by this to flee once more, but is rapidly overtaken, strongly attacked and at last seized—that is to say, held fast in a hollow in the outline of the other. This is exactly what it has been trying to avoid, as it counters the stronger one's buffets with blows that are weaker but swifter. Now I see all its lines shudder, its centers

throb desperately; and the lines gradually thin out, grow pale; the centers blur. After a few minutes, it is set free: it withdraws slowly, dull, debilitated. Its antagonist, on the contrary, glows more brightly; its lines are more vivid, its centers clearer and livelier.

This fight has moved me profoundly. I think about it and compare it with the fights I sometimes see between *our* animals. I realize confusedly that the *Moedigen*, as a group, do not kill, or rarely kill, that the victor contents itself with *increasing its strength* at the expense of the vanquished.

The morning wears on; it is nearly eight o'clock; the Zwartendam school is about to open. I gain the house in one leap, seize my books, and here I am among my fellows, where no one guesses what profound mysteries palpitate around him, where no one has the least idea of the living things through which all humanity passes and which pass through humanity, leaving no mark of that mutual penetration.

I am a very poor scholar. My writing is nothing but a hasty scrawl, unformed, illegible; my speech remains uncomprehended; my absence of mind is manifest. The master calls out continually, "Karel Onderet, have you done with watching the flies?"

Alas, my dear master! It is true that I watch the flies in the air, but how much more does my mind accompany the mysterious *Vuren* that pass through the room! And what strange feelings obsess my childish mind, to note everyone's blindness and above all your own, grave shepherd of intellects!

5.

The most painful period of my life was that which ran from my twelfth to my eighteenth year.

To begin with, my parents tried to send me to the academy. I knew nothing there but misery and frustration. At the price of exhausting struggles, I succeeded in expressing the most ordinary things in a partially comprehensible manner: slowing my syllables with great effort, I uttered them awkwardly and with the intonations of the deaf. But as soon as I had to do with anything complicated, my speech regained its fatal swiftness; no one could follow me any longer. Therefore I could not register my progress orally. Moreover, my writing

was atrocious, my letters piled up one on the other, and in my impatience I forgot whole syllables and words; it was a monstrous hodgepodge. Besides, writing was a torment to me, perhaps even more intolerable than speech—of an asphyxiating slowness, heaviness! If occasionally, by taking much pain and sweating great drops, I succeeded in beginning an exercise, at once I was at the end of my energy and patience; I felt about to faint. Accordingly I preferred the masters' remonstrances, the anger of my father, punishments, privations, scorn, to this horrible labor.

Thus I was almost totally deprived of the means of expression. Already an object of ridicule for my thinness and my strange color, my odd eyes, once more I passed for a kind of idiot. It was necessary for my parents to withdraw me from school and resign themselves to making a peasant of me.

The day my father decided to give up all hope, he said to me with unaccustomed gentleness, "My poor boy, you see I have done my duty—my whole duty. Never reproach me for your fate."

I was strongly moved. I shed warm tears; never had I felt more bitterly my isolation in the midst of men. I dared to embrace my father tenderly; I muttered, "Just the same, it's not true that I'm a halfwit!" And, in fact, I felt myself superior to those who had been my fellow pupils. Some time ago my intelligence had undergone a remarkable development. I read, I understood, I divined; and I had enormous matter for reflection, beyond that of other men, in that universe visible to me alone.

My father could not make out my words, but he softened to my embrace. "Poor boy!" he said.

I looked at him; I was in terrible distress, knowing too well that the gap between us would never be bridged. My mother, through love's intuition, saw in that moment that I was not inferior to the other boys of my age. She gazed at me tenderly, she spoke artless love words that came from the depths of her being. Nonetheless, I was condemned to give up my studies.

Because of my lack of muscular strength, I was given the care of the horses and the cattle. In this I acquitted myself admirably; I needed no dog to guard the herds, in which no colt or stallion was as agile as I.

Thus, from my fourteenth to my seventeenth year I lived the solitary life of the herdsman. It suited me better than any other. Given over to observation and contemplation, together with some reading, my mind never stopped growing. Incessantly I compared the two orders of creation which lay before my eyes; I drew from them ideas about the constitution of the universe; vaguely I sketched out hypotheses and systems. If it be true that in that period my thoughts were not perfectly ordered, did not make a lucid synthesis—for they were adolescent thoughts, uncoordinated, impatient, enthusiastic—nevertheless they were original, and fruitful. That their value may have depended above all upon my unique constitution, I would be the last to deny. But they did not draw all their strength from that source. I think I may say without pride that in subtlety as in logic they notably surpassed those of ordinary young men.

They alone brought consolation to my melancholy half-pariah's life, without companions, without any real communication with the rest of my household, even my adorable mother.

At the age of seventeen, life became definitely unsupportable to me. I was weary of dreaming, weary of vegetating on a desert island of thought. I fell into languor and boredom. I rested immobile for long hours, indifferent to the whole world, inattentive to anything that happened in my family. What mattered it that I knew of more marvelous things than other men, since in any case this knowledge must die with me? What was the mystery of living things to me, or even the duality of the two living systems crossing through each other without awareness of each other? These things might have intoxicated me, filled me with enthusiasm and ardor, if I could have taught them or shared them in any way. But what would you! Vain and sterile, absurd and miserable, they contributed rather to my perpetual psychic quarantine.

Many times I dreamed of setting down, recording, in spite of everything, by dint of continuous effort, some of my observations. But since leaving school I had completely abandoned the pen, and, already so wretched a scribbler, it was all I could do, with the utmost application, to trace the twenty-six letters of the alphabet. If I had still entertained any hope, perhaps I should have persisted. But who would have taken my miserable lucubrations seriously? Where was

the reader who would not think me mad? Where the sage who would not show me the door with irony or disdain?

To what end, therefore, should I consecrate myself to that vain task, that exasperating torment, almost comparable to the requirement, for an ordinary man, to grave his thoughts upon tablets of marble with a huge chisel and a Cyclopean hammer? My penmanship would have had to be stenographic—and yet more: of a superswift stenography! Thus I had no courage at all to write, and at the same time I fervently hoped for I know not what unforeseen event, what happy and singular destiny. It seemed to me that there must exist, in some corner of the earth, impartial minds, lucid, searching, qualified to study me, to understand me, to extract my great secret from me and communicate it to others. But where were these men? What hope had I of ever meeting them?

And I fell once more into a vast melancholy, into the desire for immobility and extinction. During one whole autumn, I despaired of the universe. I languished in a vegetative state, from which I emerged only to give way to long groans, followed by painful rebellions of conscience.

I grew thinner still, thin to a fantastic degree. The villagers called me, ironically, "*den Heyligen Gheest*," the Holy Ghost. My silhouette was tremulous as that of the young poplars, faint as a shadow; and with all this, I grew to a giant's stature.

Slowly, a project was born. Since my life had been thrown into the discard, since my days were without joy and all was darkness and bitterness to me, why wallow in sloth? Supposing that no mind existed which could respond to my own—at least it would be worth the effort to convince myself of that fact. At least it would be worth while to leave this gloomy countryside, to go and search for scientists and philosophers in the great cities. Was I not in myself an object of curiosity? Before calling attention to my extrahuman knowledge, could I not arouse a desire to study my person? Were not the mere physical aspects of my being worthy of analysis—and my sight, and the extreme swiftness of my movements, and the peculiarity of my diet?

The more I thought of it, the more it seemed reasonable to me to hope, and the more my resolution hardened. The day came when it was unshakable, when I confided it to my parents. Neither one nor the other understood much of it,

but in the end both gave in to repeated entreaties: I obtained permission to go to Amsterdam, free to return if fortune should not favor me.

One morning, I left.

6.

From Zwartendam to Amsterdam is a matter of a hundred kilometers or thereabouts. I covered that distance easily in two hours, without any other adventure than the extreme surprise of those going and coming to see me run so swiftly, and a few crowds at the edges of the villages and towns I skirted. To make sure of my direction, I spoke two or three times to solitary old people. My sense of orientation, which is excellent, did the rest.

It was about nine o'clock when I reached Amsterdam. I entered the great city resolutely and walked along its beautiful, dreaming canals, where quiet merchant fleets dwell. I did not attract as much attention as I had feared. I walked quickly, among busy people, enduring here and there the gibes of some young street Arabs. Nevertheless, I did not decide to stop. I wandered here and there through the city, until at last I resolved to enter a tavern on one of the quays of the Heerengracht. It was a peaceful spot; the magnificent canal stretched, full of life, between cool rows of trees; and among the *Moedigen* which I saw moving about on its banks it seemed to me that I perceived a new species. After some hesitation, I crossed the sill of the tavern, and addressing myself to the publican as slowly as I could, I begged him to be kind enough to direct me to a hospital.

The landlord looked at me with amazement, suspicion and curiosity; took his huge pipe out of his mouth, put it back in after several attempts, and at last said, "You're from the colonies, I suppose?"

Since it was perfectly useless to contradict him, I answered, "Just so!"

He seemed delighted at his own shrewdness. He asked me another question: "Maybe you come from that part of Borneo where no one has ever been?"

"Exactly right!"

I had spoken too swiftly: his eyes grew round.

"Exactly right," I repeated more slowly.

The landlord smiled with satisfaction. "You can hardly speak Dutch, can you? So, it's a hospital you want. No doubt you're sick?"

"Yes."

Patrons were gathering around. It was whispered already that I was an anthropophagus from Borneo; nevertheless, they looked at me with much more curiosity than aversion. People were running in from the street. I became nervous and uneasy. I kept my composure nonetheless and said, coughing, "I am very sick!"

"Just like the monkeys from that country," said a very fat man benevolently. "The Netherlands kills them!"

"What a funny skin!" added another.

"And how does he see?" asked a third, pointing to my eyes.

The ring moved closer, encircling me with a hundred curious stares, and still newcomers were crowding into the room.

"How tall he is!"

In truth, I was a full head taller than the biggest of them.

"And thin!"

"This anthropophagy doesn't seem to nourish them very well!"

Not all the voices were spiteful. A few sympathetic persons protected me:

"Don't crowd so—he's sick!"

"Come, friend, courage!" said the fat man, remarking my nervousness. "I'll lead you to a hospital myself."

He took me by the arm and set about elbowing the crowd aside, calling, "Way for an invalid!"

Dutch crowds are not very fierce. They let us pass, but they went with us. We walked along the canal, followed by a compact multitude, and people cried out, "It's a cannibal from Borneo!"

At length we reached a hospital. It was the visiting hour. I was taken to an intern, a young man with blue spectacles, who greeted me peevishly. My companion said to him, "He's a savage from the colonies."

"What, a savage!" cried the other.

He took off his spectacles to look at me. Surprise held him motionless for a moment. He asked me brusquely, "Can you see?"

"I see very well."

I had spoken too swiftly.

"It's his accent," said the fat man proudly. "Once more, friend."

I repeated it and made myself understood.

"Those aren't human eyes," murmured the student. "And the color! Is that the color of your race?"

Then I said, with a terrible effort to slow myself down, "I have come to show myself to a scientist."

"Then you're not ill?"

"No."

"And you come from Borneo?"

"No."

"Where are you from, then?"

"From Zwartendam, near Duisburg."

"Why, then, does this man claim you're from Borneo?"

"I didn't want to contradict him."

"And you wish to see a scientist?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"To be studied."

"So as to earn money?"

"No, for nothing."

"You're not a pauper? A beggar?"

"No!"

"What makes you want to be studied?"

"My constitution—"

But again, in spite of my efforts, I had spoken too swiftly. I had to repeat myself.

"Are you sure you can see me?" he asked, staring at me. "Your eyes are like horn."

"I see very well."

And, moving to left and right, I snatched things up, put them down, threw them in the air and caught them again.

"Extraordinary!" said the young man.

His softened voice, almost friendly, filled me with hope. "See here," he said at last, "I really think Dr. van den Heuvel might be interested in your case. I'll go and inform him. Wait in the next room. And, by the way—I forgot—you're not ill, after all?"

"Not in the least."

"Good. Wait—go in there. The doctor won't be long."

I found myself seated among monsters preserved in alco-

hol: fetuses, infants with bestial shapes, colossal batrachians, vaguely anthropomorphic saurians.

This is well chosen for my waiting room, I thought. Am I not a candidate for one of these brandy-filled sepulchers?

7.

When Dr. van den Heuvel appeared, emotion overcame me. I had the thrill of the Promised Land—the joy of reaching it; the dread of being banished. The doctor, with his great bald forehead, the analyst's penetrating look, the mouth soft and yet stubborn, examined me in silence. As always, my excessive thinness, my great stature, my horny eyes, my violet color, caused him astonishment.

"You say you wish to be studied?" he asked at length.

I answered forcefully, almost violently, "Yes!"

He smiled with an approving air and asked me the usual question: "Do you see all right, with those eyes?"

"Very well. I can even see through wood, clouds—"

But I had spoken too fast. He glanced at me uneasily. I began again, sweating great drops: "I can even see through wood, clouds—"

"Really! That would be extraordinary. Well, then! What do you see through the door there?" He pointed to a closed door.

"A big library with windows . . . a carved table . . ."

"Really!" he repeated, stunned.

My breast swelled; a deep stillness entered my soul.

The scientist remained silent for a few seconds. Then: "You speak with some difficulty."

"Otherwise I should speak too rapidly! I cannot speak slowly."

"Well, then, speak a little as you do naturally."

Accordingly I told him the story of my entry into Amsterdam. He listened to me with an extreme attention, an air of intelligent observation, which I had never before encountered among my fellows. He understood nothing of what I said, but he showed the keenness of his intellect.

"If I am not mistaken, you speak fifteen to twenty syllables a second, that is to say three or four times more than the human ear can distinguish. Your voice, in addition, is much higher than anything I have ever heard in the way of human

voices. Your excessively rapid gestures are well suited to your speech. Your whole constitution is probably more rapid than ours."

"I run," I said, "faster than a greyhound. I write—"

"Ah!" he interrupted. "Let us see your writing."

I scrawled some words on a tablet which he offered me, the first few fairly legible, the rest more and more scrambled, abbreviated.

"Perfect!" he said, and a certain pleasure was mingled with his surprise. "I really think I must congratulate myself on this meeting. Certainly it should be very interesting to study you."

"It is my dearest, my only, desire!"

"And mine, naturally. Science . . ."

He seemed preoccupied, musing. He finished by saying, "If only we could find an easy way of communication."

He walked back and forth, his brows knotted. Suddenly: "What a dolt I am! You must learn shorthand, of course! Hm! . . . Hm!" A cheerful expression spread over his face. "And I've forgotten the phonograph—the perfect confidant! All that's needed is to revolve it more slowly in the reproduction than in the recording. It's agreed: you shall stay with me while you are in Amsterdam!"

The joy of a fulfilled vocation, the delight of ceasing to spend vain and sterile days! Aware of the intelligent personality of the doctor, against this scientific background, I felt a delicious well-being; the melancholy of my spiritual solitude, the sorrow for my lost talents, the pariah's long misery that had weighed me down for so many years, all vanished, evaporated in the sensation of a new life, a real life, a saved destiny!

8.

Beginning the following day, the doctor made all the necessary arrangements. He wrote to my parents; he sent me to a professor of stenography and obtained some phonographs. As he was quite rich and entirely devoted to science, there was no experiment which he could not undertake, and my vision, my hearing, my musculature, the color of my skin, were submitted to scrupulous investigations, from which he drew more and more enthusiasm, crying, "This verges on the miraculous!"

I very well understood, after the first few days, how important it was to go about things methodically—from the simple to the complex, from the slightly abnormal to the wonderfully abnormal. Thus I had recourse to a little leger-demain, of which I made no secret to the doctor: that is, I revealed my abilities to him only one at a time.

The quickness of my perceptions and movements drew his attention first. He was able to convince himself that the subtlety of my hearing was in proportion to the swiftness of my speech. Graduated trials of the most fugitive sounds, which I imitated with ease, and the words of ten or fifteen persons all talking at once, which I distinguished perfectly, demonstrated this point beyond question. My vision proved no less swift; comparative tests between my ability to resolve the movement of a galloping horse, or an insect in flight, and the same ability of an apparatus for taking instantaneous photographs, proved all in favor of my eye.

As for perceptions of ordinary things, simultaneous movements of a group of people, of children playing, the motion of machines, bits of rubble thrown in the air or little balls tossed into an alley, to be counted in flight—they amazed the doctor's family and friends.

My running in the big garden, my twenty-meter jumps, my instantaneous swiftness to pick up objects or put them back, were admired still more, not by the doctor, but by those around him. And it was an ever renewed pleasure for the wife and children of my host, while walking in the fields, to see me outstrip a horseman at full gallop or follow the flight of any swallow; in truth, there was no thoroughbred but I could give it a start of two-thirds the distance, whatever it might be, nor any bird I could not easily overtake.

As for the doctor, more and more satisfied with the results of his experiments, he described me thus: "A human being, endowed in all his movements with a swiftness incomparably superior, not merely to that of other humans, but also to that of all known animals. This swiftness, found in the most minute constituents of his body as well as in the whole organism, makes him an entity so distinct from the remainder of creation that he merits a special place in the animal kingdom for himself alone. As for the curious structure of his eyes, as well as the skin's violet color, these must be considered simply the earmarks of this special condition."

Tests being made of my muscular system, it proved in no

way remarkable, unless for its excessive leanness. Neither did my ears yield any particular information; nor, for that matter, did my skin—except, of course, for its pigmentation. As for my dark hair, a purplish black in color, it was fine as spiderweb, and the doctor made a minute examination of it.

“One would need to dissect you!” he often told me, laughing.

Thus time passed easily. I had quickly learned to write in shorthand, thanks to my intense desire and to the natural aptitude I showed for this method of rapid transcription, into which, by the way, I introduced several new abbreviations. I began to make notes, which my stenographer transcribed; for the rest, we had phonographs built, according to the doctor's special design, which proved perfectly suited to reproduce my voice at a lower speed.

At length my host's confidence in me became complete. During the first few weeks he had not been able to avoid the suspicion—a very natural one—that my peculiar abilities might be accompanied by some mental abnormality, some cerebral derangement. This anxiety once put aside, our relations became perfectly cordial, and I think, as fascinating for one as for the other.

We made analytic tests of my ability to see through a great number of “opaque” substances; and of the dark coloration which water, glass or quartz takes on for me at certain thicknesses. It will be recalled that I can see clearly through wood, leaves, clouds and many other substances; that I can barely make out the bottom of a pool of water half a meter deep; and that a window, though transparent, is less so to me than to the average person and has a rather dark color. A thick piece of glass appears blackish to me. The doctor convinced himself at leisure of all these singularities—astonished above all to see me make out the stars on cloudy nights.

Only then did I begin to tell him that colors too present themselves differently to me. Experience established beyond doubt that red, orange, yellow, green, blue and indigo are perfectly invisible to me, like infrared or ultraviolet to a normal eye. On the other hand, I was able to show that I perceive violet, and beyond violet a range of colors—a spectrum at least double that which extends from the red to the violet.*

* Quartz gives me a spectrum of about eight colors: the longest violet and the seven succeeding colors in the ultraviolet. But there remain about eight more colors which are not refracted by quartz, and which are refracted more or less by other substances.

This amazed the doctor more than all the rest. His study of it was long and painstaking; it was conducted, besides, with enormous cunning. In this accomplished experimenter's hands, it became the source of subtle discoveries in the order of sciences as they are ranked by humanity; it gave him the key to far-ranging phenomena of magnetism, of chemical affinities, of induction; it guided him toward new conceptions of physiology. To know that a given metal shows a series of unknown tints, variable according to the pressure, the temperature, the electric charge, that the most rarefied gases have distinct colors, even at small depths; to learn of the infinite tonal richness of objects which appear more or less black, whereas they present a more magnificent spectrum in the ultraviolet than that of all known colors; to know, finally, the possible variations in unknown hues of an electric circuit, the bark of a tree, the skin of a man, in a day, an hour, a minute—the use that an ingenious scientist might make of such ideas can readily be imagined.

We worked patiently for a whole year without my mentioning the *Moedigen*. I wished to convince my host absolutely, give him countless proofs of my visual faculties, before daring the supreme confidence. At length, the time came when I felt I could reveal everything.

9.

It happened in a mild autumn full of clouds, which rolled across the vault of the sky for a week without shedding a drop of rain. One morning van den Heuvel and I were walking in the garden. The doctor was silent, completely absorbed in his speculations, of which I was the principal subject. At the far end, he began to speak:

"It's a nice thing to dream about, anyhow: to see through clouds, pierce through to the ether, whereas we, blind as we are . . ."

"If the sky were all I saw!" I answered.

"Oh, yes—the whole world, so different . . ."

"Much more different even than I've told you!"

"How's that?" he cried with an avid curiosity. "Have you been hiding something from me?"

"The most important thing!"

He stood facing me, staring at me fixedly, in real distress, in which some element of the mystical seemed to be blended.

"Yes, the most important thing!"

We had come near the house, and I dashed in to ask for a phonograph. The instrument that was brought to me was an advanced model, highly perfected by my friend, and could record a long speech; the servant put it down on the stone table where the doctor and his family took coffee on mild summer evenings. A miracle of exact, fine construction, the device lent itself admirably to recording casual talks. Our dialogue went on, therefore, almost like an ordinary conversation.

"Yes, I've hidden the main thing from you, because I wanted your complete confidence first—and even now, after all the discoveries you've made about my organism, I am afraid you won't find it easy to believe me, at least to begin with."

I stopped to let the machine repeat this sentence. I saw the doctor grow pale, with the pallor of a great scientist in the presence of a new aspect of matter. His hands were trembling.

"I shall believe you!" he said, with a certain solemnity.

"Even if I try to tell you that our order of creation—I mean our animal and vegetable world—isn't the only life on earth, that there is another, as vast, as numerous, as varied, invisible to your eyes?"

He scented occultism and could not refrain from saying, "The world of the fourth state of matter—departed souls, the phantoms of the spiritualists."

"No, no, nothing like that. A world of living creatures, doomed like us to a short life, to organic needs—birth, growth, struggle. A world as weak and ephemeral as ours, a world governed by laws equally rigid, if not identical, a world equally imprisoned by the earth, equally vulnerable to accident, but otherwise completely different from ours, without any influence on ours, as we have no influence on it—except through the changes it makes in our common ground, the earth, or through the parallel changes that we create in the same ground."

I do not know if van den Heuvel believed me, but certainly he was in the grip of strong emotion. "They are fluid, in short?" he asked.

"That's what I don't know how to answer, for their properties are too contradictory to fit into our ideas of matter. The earth is as resistant to them as to us, and the same with most

minerals, although they can penetrate a little way into a humus. Also, they are totally impermeable and solid with respect to each other. But they can pass through plants, animals, organic tissues, although sometimes with a certain difficulty; and we ourselves pass through them the same way. If one of them could be aware of us, we should perhaps seem fluid with respect to them, as they seem fluid with respect to us; but probably he could no more *decide* about it than I can—he would be struck by similar contradictions. There is one peculiarity about their shape: they have hardly any thickness. They are of all sizes. I've known some to reach a hundred meters in length, and others are as tiny as our smallest insects. Some of them feed on earth and air, others on air and on their own kind—without killing as we do, however, because it's enough for the stronger to draw strength from the weaker, and because this strength can be extracted without draining the springs of life."

The doctor said brusquely, "Have you seen them ever since childhood?"

I guessed that he was imagining some more or less recent disorder in my body. "Since childhood," I answered vigorously. "I'll give you all the proofs you like."

"Do you see them now?"

"I see them. There are a great many in the garden."

"Where?"

"On the path, the lawns, on the walls, in the air. For there are terrestrial and aerial ones—and aquatic ones too, but those hardly ever leave the surface of the water."

"Are they numerous everywhere?"

"Yes, and hardly less so in town than in the country, in houses than in the street. Those that like the indoors are smaller, though, no doubt because of the difficulty of getting in and out, even though they find a wooden door no obstacle."

"And iron . . . glass . . . brick?"

"All impermeable to them."

"Will you describe one of them, a fairly large one?"

"I see one near that tree. Its shape is extremely elongated, and rather irregular. It is convex toward the right, concave toward the left, with swellings and hollows: it looks something like an enlarged photograph of a big, fat larva. But its structure is not typical of the Kingdom, because structure varies a great deal from one species (if I may use that word)

to another. Its extreme thinness, on the other hand, is a common characteristic: it can hardly be more than a tenth of a millimeter in thickness, whereas it's one hundred and fifty centimeters long and forty centimeters across at its widest.

"What distinguishes this, and the whole Kingdom, above all are the lines that cross it in nearly every direction, ending in networks that fan out between two systems of lines. Each system has a center, a kind of spot that is slightly raised above the mass of the body, or occasionally hollowed out. These centers have no fixed form; sometimes they are almost circular or elliptical, sometimes twisted or helical, sometimes divided by many narrow throats. They are astonishingly mobile, and their size varies from hour to hour. Their borders palpitate strongly, in a sort of transverse undulation. In general, the lines that emerge from them are big, although there are also very fine ones; they diverge, and end in an infinity of delicate traceries which gradually fade away. However, certain lines, much paler than the others, are not produced by the centers; they stay isolated in the system and grow without changing their color. These lines have the faculty of moving within the body, and of varying their curves, while the centers and their connected lines remain stable.

"As for the colors of my *Moedig*, I must forego any attempt to describe them to you; none of them falls within the spectrum perceptible to your eye, and none has a name in your vocabulary. They are extremely brilliant in the networks, weaker in the centers, very much faded in the independent lines, which, however, have a very high brilliance—an ultraviolet metallic effect, so to speak. . . . I have some observations on the habits, the diet and the range of the *Moedigen*, but I don't wish to submit them to you just now."

I fell silent. The doctor listened twice to the words recorded by our faultless interpreter; then for a long time he was silent. Never had I seen him in such a state: his face was rigid, stony, his eyes glassy and cataleptic; a heavy film of sweat covered his temples and dampened his hair. He tried to speak and failed. Trembling, he walked all around the garden; and when he reappeared, his eyes and mouth expressed a violent passion, fervent, religious; he seemed more like the disciple of some new faith than like a peaceful investigator.

At last he muttered, "I'm overwhelmed! Everything you have just said seems terribly lucid—and have I the right to

doubt, considering all the wonders you've already shown me?"

"Doubt!" I said warmly. "Doubt as hard as you can! Your experiments will be all the more fruitful for it."

"Ah," he said in a dreaming voice, "it's the pure stuff of wonder, and so magnificently superior to the pointless marvels of fairy tales! My poor human intelligence is so tiny before such knowledge! I feel an enormous enthusiasm. Yet something in me doubts . . ."

"Let's work to dispel your doubt—our efforts will pay for themselves ten times over!"

10.

We worked; and it took the doctor only a few weeks to clear up all his uncertainties. Several ingenious experiments, together with the undeniable consistency of all the statements I had made, and two or three lucky discoveries about the *Moedigen's* influence on atmospheric phenomena, left no question in his mind. When we were joined by the doctor's elder son, a young man of great scientific aptitude, the fruitfulness of our work and the conclusiveness of our findings were again increased.

Thanks to my companions' methodical habits of mind, and their experience in study and classification—qualities which I was absorbing little by little—whatever was uncoordinated or confused in my knowledge of the *Moedigen* rapidly became transformed. Our discoveries multiplied; rigorous experiments gave firm results, in circumstances which in ancient times and even up to the last century would have suggested at most a few trifling diversions.

It is now five years since we began our researches. They are far, very far from completion. Even a preliminary report of our work can hardly appear in the near future. In any case, we have made it a rule to do nothing in haste; our discoveries are of too immanent a kind not to be set forth in the most minute detail, with the most sovereign patience and the finest precision. We have no other investigator to forestall, no patent to take out or ambition to satisfy. We stand at a height where vanity and pride fade away. How can there be any comparison between the joys of our work and the wretched lure of human fame? Besides, do not all these things flow from the single accident of my physical organization? What

a petty thing it would be, then, for us to boast about them!

No; we live excitedly, always on the verge of wonders, and yet we live in immutable serenity.

I have had an adventure which adds to the interest of my life, and which fills me with infinite joy during my leisure hours. You know how ugly I am; my bizarre appearance is fit only to horrify young women. All the same, I have found a companion who not only can put up with my show of affection, but even takes pleasure in it.

She is a poor girl, hysterical and nervous, whom we met one day in a hospital in Amsterdam. Others find her wretched-looking, plaster-white, hollow-cheeked, with wild eyes. But to me her appearance is pleasant, her company charming. From the very beginning my presence, far from alarming her like all the rest, seemed to please and comfort her. I was touched; I wanted to see her again.

It was quickly discovered that I had a beneficial influence on her health and well-being. On examination, it appeared that I influenced her by animal magnetism: my nearness, and above all the touch of my hands, gave her a really curative gaiety, serenity, and calmness of spirit. In turn, I took pleasure in being near her. Her face seemed lovely to me; her pallor and slenderness were no more than signs of delicacy; for me her eyes, able to perceive the glow of magnets, like those of many hyperesthesiacs, had none at all of the distracted quality that others criticized.

In short, I felt an attraction for her, and she returned it with passion. From that time, I resolved to marry her. I gained my end readily, thanks to the good will of my friends.

This union has been a happy one. My wife's health was re-established, although she remained extremely sensitive and frail. I tasted the joy of being like other men in the essential part of life. But my happiness was crowned six months ago: a child was born to us, and in this child are combined all the faculties of my constitution. Color, vision, hearing, extreme rapidity of movement, diet—he promises to be an exact copy of my physiology.

The doctor watches him grow with delight. A wonderful hope has come to us—that the study of the *Moedig* World, of the Kingdom parallel to our own, this study which demands so much time and patience, will not end when I cease to be. My son will pursue it, undoubtedly, in his turn. Why may he not find collaborators of genius, able to raise it to a new

power? Why may he also not give life to seers of the invisible world?

As for myself, may I not look forward to other children, may I not hope that my dear wife may give birth to other sons of my flesh, like unto their father? As I think of it, my heart trembles, I am filled with an infinite beatitude; and I know myself blessed among men.