

## Switzerland

*En Suisse En Suisse En Suisse En Suisse En Suisse En Suisse En Suisse*

A man walks by; I look at him from above. *Hey! En Suisse! Nous sommes en Suisse!* The wind sweeps up my voice in its soft but cold arms away from the man walking below on the sidewalk en Suisse so that he cannot hear me, and drops it quietly, and with a tone of defamation, into the lake. “Please do not make a scene of this,” it asks me. “Know that it is out of necessity to keep the city clean: *C’est absolument nécessaire.*”

That’s OK, I shout back, That’s OK, we are still all here, aren’t we? And my arms dance now with the wind above my head, and they are both so happy together like this that they do not shout back down to me to say *Hey! Nous sommes en Suisse!* But I don’t feel too rotten about this, actually I’m quite all right, and I laugh, the wind sweeping up my voice in its le Jet d’Eau charm, before dumping it into the lake.

So instead I look across from me, at the dazzling spectacle of a brown-tiled roof, glimmering and sweating under the sun, shaped in bulbous stacks on top of one another, complete with a treacherously pointed spire topped like a maraschino cherry. *What a building!*

And later on my walk:

Voices sweep all around me like a wind, French whispers that are partially visible to my ears and to my tongue. If I concentrate hard enough, and if I block out the clamorous voice of my guide, walking with me, dragging me around his city as an owner feels obligated to walk his dog, I am able to make out the words of these phantoms:

*Et as-tu elle vu maintenant? Incroyable! Elle a maigrit, tu ne la reconnais pas.*

“And have you seen her now? Incredible! She’s gained weight, you wouldn’t recognize her.”

*Je promets que je disais la vérité! Je t’aime ma chérie, je ne mens pas à toi, je ne suis pas allé à la.*

“I promise I’m telling the truth! I love you darling, I wouldn’t lie to you, I didn’t go there.”

*Étés-vous allée au quartier chaud?*

And as his temporary pet I feel that I should at least oblige him, and every now and then I nod my head, or present a faint smile, that assures him I am in fact listening, that I am indeed swept away with his consternation that he really does live across from the most beautiful building in Genève, with its cherry-spire and porous bulbs. A belief he really must have felt strongly about, since he has already stressed this multiple times, and each instance holding equal vehemence. So like a dog I oblige him in heeling to his praise of this building, of how he really should have gone for a run this morning, of whether this winter was in fact normal, or if, perhaps, it was milder than usual.

“Have you ever been to the red light district,” he asks me with a sudden burst of inspiration. I tell him no, I had not; “Last time I was there I was accosted by a prostitute.” And while I wait for him to elaborate on more of this interaction, I wonder if this was an appropriate thing to tell me as his patron, and then I wonder, if we were speaking in French, would we be using ‘vous?’ but then I decide that none of this matters anyways, as there was nothing more to his story.

As we are walking along the lake he continues to talk freely of either this, or that, oblivious to the fact that I have now altogether stopped listening.

His voice is now swept away in the arms of the wind. Charmed by its European-ness. *Par le vent de la Suisse*. Now released into the lake, where it can gurgle beneath the water contentedly.

We pass a tired-looking woman with long disheveled hair walking her dog. She slowly drags him along the edge of the grass. Neither one seems particularly interested in the other, but she continues muttering to the large animal nonetheless. Large dog stops at this point. Bends head and sniffs: Interest? Curiosity? Discovery?? The woman is oblivious; she is heedless; she is even a tyrant. She upholds her conviction to be a good owner and pulls on the leash, the dog's neck inching after her while its feet try to stay planted on the ground. She cannot hear the dog's intellectual theories regarding the spot: *Mais, qu'est-ce c'est?*; to her it is just a mundane lawn, unable to differentiate *these* particular green blades from the rest: *Ce n'est rien*. We pass them and then they are gone from us. Now *they* are nothing.

We pass them and then they are gone from us but we are all still en Suisse en Suisse *en Suisse*. *Nous sommes tous encore en Suisse!*

And anyways their disappearance does not leave us alone; there are many people also walking along the lake, though they appear as nothing more than specters. At each passing the only hints of another existence are the chilly wind felt and the fragments of echoing whispers left behind on the sidewalk. No one cares to catch the *Hey!s* being

tossed about in the air, then drowned alongside the Jet d'Eau, everyone is just being pulled forward by some invisible owner.

And we are all being pulled forward and forward and forward *en Suisse en Suisse* *en Suisse* and pulling forward on this very clean sidewalk along the Jet d'Eau, which is always spurting upwards in a questionable fashion. Up and Up and Up it ejaculates and falls back into itself, *Hey! En Suisse!* just as I had shouted down into the passing man, *Nous sommes en Suisse!* but my excited exclamations did not make it into his ears, they instead fell flat into the soft but cold arms of le vent de la Suisse, where it carried it all the way to the lake and then gently drowned it alongside the residue from the fountain's ejaculation.

I had quite the time in the shower, too.

For all I tried, I couldn't figure the damn thing out. The shower itself seemed simple enough: a lever that you pull forward, and that you could turn to adjust the water's temperature. Granted, you had to hold the shower head in your hands and move around to get the water where you wanted it, rather than you moving around the water, but still, this all could be quite manageable.

So here I was wrong. *En Suisse!*

Here is the description of my interaction with la douche de la Suisse; it is a little more in-depth than the prostitute story:

First here is the description of the shower's configuration:

It acts like a combination of a shower and a bathtub. The showerhead sits in a little showerhead holder attached to the wall. There is a partial glass screen that only

spans half of the tub, so one must really be careful at all times not to be too liberal when rotating the faucet around oneself. Otherwise it can lead to the disastrous result of water splashing everywhere, spurting on the walls, the floor, the towels: *Zut! Zut! Zut!* But it is still realistic to acknowledge the inevitability that everything in the bathroom will become at least a little damp in the process: *C'est triste, mais c'est la vie*. One must adopt a complacent attitude in the realm of la douche de la Suisse. It's sad, but it's life.

OK my interaction leading to its breaking follows as such:

Long story short, I broke the lever. I kept twisting the handle, adjusting the temperature so that it could be just right. However I must have done this too rigorously, with too much *je ne sais quoi*, so that eventually the water could no longer turn on and I was stuck in a puddle of cooling water with shampoo in my hair. I had no choice but to lie down in the tub and splash the sparse remains of the water around me, though as I was too tall to fit in a horizontal position perfectly, I was required to arch my shoulder blades against the basin, both feet planted, and arch my *derrière* upwards, so as to gain leverage while rinsing the suds from my hair.

Understandably this process took a bit of time, and I suppose both the combined quietness of my “shower” (save for the limp splashes that could, I’m sure, be heard from the other side of the door) and the incredible length in which I was locked up in the bathroom, concerned my keepers, so that about twenty minutes in I heard first a faint, timid knocking, which then, in my reluctance to muster a response, grew into a forceful pounding. *Allo? J. toutes les choses ça va?*

Their voice sounded in my ears like a shameful siren, like a mother's voice as she walks into her son's room as he is masturbating: I remembered that, for some reason, there was no lock on the bathroom door. My heart stopped and climbed up into my mouth upon this realization. Finally, in order to prevent them from walking in and catching me in the middle of my crime, I succumbed to their questioning fists—and here I must add that I have no idea why I initially refused to speak up, perhaps it was from shame, perhaps it was mere laziness—*Oui, ça va, juste un plus minute, s'il vous plait!* There was a pause and I kept still until I heard their fingers relinquish on the doorknob and their footsteps walk away and down the hall. I was able to resume my “shower” and made sure to not mention to my hosts about the disassembled lever. In the entire process water had somehow been released everywhere. They discovered all of this soon afterwards when the woman went to take a shower. They thought initially it was a simple matter of a faulty configuration, but later they realized that a plumber was needed and that it was I who had broken it.

I was not asked to return.

*Et voilà.*

Now currently:

Everyone sweeps by me as they are dragged on leashes made of invisible threads, their echoing wind leaving cold splashes on my face. It is a residual mist. I remain standing as I wipe their proof from my face with the back of my hand. No handkerchief. No tissue. No sock, even. I then wipe the stickiness onto my pants, which I will later hide

deep within a drawer. And then I continue to wait for the train taking me away from the  
Purell-streets and obligated inhabitants.

And I wait.

And I wait.

I wait for a long time.

I thought les trains de la Suisse étaient ponctuels.

J'ai pensé.

They are punctual. But, admittedly, I did not bother to look up the train schedule  
before heading out the door. I was in a rush.

I tell you, *they did not want me back!*

Oh how the vents de la Suisse have changed!

Oh craigslist couch surfing!

OK, it's true! I am a bull in a china shop! I've killed ants with my own two feet!

So I am taking a train.

I shouted to them, *I'll go to les Alpes!*

*Allez en enfer!*, they told me back.

*Hey! En Suisse!* The seeds from their sweat tell me. But I do not hear, I am too  
busy waiting for a train. And anyways, why should I listen to the wind! En Suisse!

But *Hey*, I am now like a dog that has run away. By breaking their shower I in  
turn break the leash tying me to said city.

Carry myself away in the stiff arms of her wind. She was an old mistress  
anyways, always dumping me and giving me—per say—cold showers.

En Suisse! I hate that fountain! What's so great about it anyhow? It looks like an ejaculation.

So I wait for this train to arrive.

It feels like hours, and it is probably only thirty minutes that I wait.

Soulless people surround me. They look as though they have been derailed by an overconsumption of a pedantic way of life. They look proud, but they are spiritless.

For instance, this man standing to my left:

Clean-shaven, a smooth pomp of grey hair carefully crafted atop his head, broad shoulders but still trim. And he is well dressed: slim-cut suit, in black, paired with a thin silk tie, also black. His shoes (black) are expensive and pointed at the toe and wears a black Tissot watch. He carries only a brown leather briefcase, distressed perfectly in style: a handsome man, all in all. One looks at him and thinks, Ah, now *here* is a man who has a care in the world!

And in fact, he doesn't. He is a mime. He acts out his duties simply because it is the right thing to do, and he gives no other thought to any other path, no thought to a life of an adventurer. He will never take an unplanned trip anywhere, especially not to a foreign city.

He is a mime; he performs archetypes of normative acts, without muttering, without shouting a word.

Sans *Hey!*s.



The vent de la Suisse need not worry about unseemly declarations from him, he does not want to be garish, he does not want to be a nuisance to society; he is intelligent, but not overwhelmingly so.

He has not been standing here long. He has timed his arrival perfectly—hear that? Here comes the train: yes, he is a *real* Swiss man.

To where is he being pulled? Home, to the suburbs of this city. He is being dragged home by his wife and children who have him chained to, granted, a very long leash, but to a leash nonetheless. It is invisible, but if you look closely, very closely, you can spot the translucent fibers shimmer in the sunlight. He will never quit his job, he may take a mistress, but as much as he tells her he loves her

*Je promets que je disais la vérité! Je t'aime ma chérie, je ne mens pas à toi, je quitterai elle.*

and that he will get a divorce, he will never leave his wife for her, and his wife will never mutter a word

*Je promets que je disais la vérité! Je t'aime ma chérie, je ne mens pas à toi, je ne suis pas allé à la.*

about it. His eyes, though handsome and blue, are sunken. He is a dog to his duties. To strict structure.

En Suisse!

The train stops; everyone gets on—no one shoves—we all climb into the different compartments like ants marching into their hole, very polite, very quiet. No *Hey!*s, or, if there are any, it is with certainty that they are swept up and far away from any of our

polite ears, and anyways, we are all too busy with boarding the train to hear anything else.

*Nous sommes en Suisse!*

I climb through the door closest to me, in total politeness, in complete obedience to the proper social conduct *en Suisse*. Everyone sits down in succession, and when it is my turn I take a seat and sit down like a dog.

But I am not like them. *I tell you with sincerest conviction*, I swear I am not like them! For instance, I am not *Suisse*. Far from it. I shout things to people, complete strangers, such as, *Hey! En suisse! Nous sommes en Suisse!* And the people here find me so outlandish, so rude, so distant, that a man walking on the sidewalk underneath my window will pretend that he does not hear me, that my voice is drowned beneath the sweeps of the wind. Or, I am so uncouth that it is infectious, that a certain couple will kick me out of their home, despite paying them for my keep, and tell me to go to hell.

*Allez en enfer!*

*J'irai aux Alpes!* I shout at them.

So I sit in a very comfortable train with my nose roosting upwards as a dog holds his head up while sitting for a treat.

But I tell you, *I am not like them*. I am not a housedog, but instead I have broken free and run off to be a mutt, to be feral, aux Alpes!

To the Alps!

I'll stay in a Swiss chalet; couch surfing turns out to be too cumbersome. In the Capital I tried to fit in, I tried to be obedient and be dragged from this corner to that, but

really I was a mutt amongst a city of pure-breds. My French is only ok, but my howls are really quite magnificent. I'll go into the Swiss mountains and I will sit not like a complying dog begging for a treat, but like a wolf atop a tall rock. And I'll howl as I damn please, I'll howl:

*Hey! En Suisse! J'suis en Suisse!*

And I won't care when no one responds, because there will be no tiny man below; I will *actually* be alone.

As the train sweeps me further and further away from le Jet d'Eau I feel my own physical release. I breathe easier.

The landscape becomes steeper. Hills are now abundant like grapes on the vines that cover them. Yet the train keeps pulling us forward, so that soon even these vineyards, pleasant to look at and still facing le lac de Genève, become distant; we pass them and they are gone from us but we are all still en Suisse en Suisse *en Suisse. Nous sommes tous encore en Suisse.*

But their disappearance does not leave us alone for long; these hills grow in size; they have metamorphosed into something else, something greater:

*Les Alpes!* I shout.

*I'm going to the Alps*

*Ce sont les Alpes!*

*Hey! Aux Alpes! Nous sommes aux Alpes!*

I look across from me, at the dazzling spectacle of a brown-ridged mountain, snow glimmering and sweating under the sun, shaped in jagged cliffs from centuries of

erosion, and I complete the image with a bravely poised wolf topped like a bridegroom on a wedding cake. *What a rock!*

I look across from me, just outside my window, smiling, and naïve like Prince Myshkin. And as one unacquainted with the surroundings, everything here is new, as a foreigner, my excited exclamations are interpreted as violent hollers, and the travelers in my compartment steal glares in my direction *Allez en enfer!*, roll their eyes, and exchange grimaces with one another like the understanding wives of unfaithful men. *I know just as well as you do; it's terrible, it's uncalled for, but still we will not say a word about it*, and they mutter to themselves as we keep pulling forward.

I'll let them scoff! *J'irai aux Alpes!* To hell with them!

Well, I sit back down in my seat and stare at the woman sitting across from me. She is already looking at my person, those popular shame-stares, and for a minute or two we face one another without saying anything. I am sitting backwards to the train's dragging direction, while she is sitting forwards. We examine one another, *not a word*.

Wheels underneath our feet shout—

no they screech—they holler!

The wheels underneath our feet sound in howls, a free body traversing the Alps, unconcerned as it shouts all the while.

Mountains move more quickly past us now. They are nothing but dark blotches seen in flashes. As these images disappear faster from us we near our perspective destinations.

This woman across from me:

She is puzzled. She has worn skin, it is papery and hints of beige appear as yellow marks on her face. Wrinkles etch the corners of her mouth and from her eyes down. She has mousey brown hair that stops at her shoulders and is brittle and straight.

*She could get caught in a mousetrap.*

She is pensive, or maybe just sad, apathetic, like her neutral eye color. Nondescript female. She wears a burgundy écharpe tight around her throat. *Keep your head up!*

Legs cross and she looks away. Out the window. At what is to her a bleak and mundane scene. It is overcast and soon it begins to rain. Her face is now pressed against the cool windowpane, eyes stretched upwards *and Up and Up and Up* a hidden tear as raindrops spurt and fall back into itself, against the glass.

*Hey! En Suisse! Nous sommes en Suisse!* I want to shout to her, but I know that she is too far away, I, foreigner, am carried by too distant a wind. *C'est triste, mais c'est la vie.* And I don't say anything, I will not say a word about it, and I mutter to myself as the train keeps pulling us forward.

I disembark at Leukerbad: a little Swiss village. I have entered an even more distant city; one where I doubly do not belong. This Leukerbad exists in the German-speaking part of les Alpes de la Suisse.

Help!

I did not realize this when I selected this stop—I chose said location at almost random. I was lured—I was tricked, even—by the village's acclaimed mineral springs.

*Salut!* I shout in French, but no one understands. I stand on the platform and people feigning deafness push past me, their words dancing now with the wind above my head, never falling into my ear's webs.

But I don't feel too rotten about this, actually I'm quite alright, and I laugh, and I shout things to myself such as, "It's now evening—the daylight is falling away!", and the people around me don't hear, because they are too busy shouting to each other and to themselves as well.

*Hey! These people are loud!*

And I pick my bag back up and now embark a bus.

Please, listen here: I am not taken to Sloth—this village is tiny, but like les Alpes, is hilly, it is mountainous, and walking is a near impossibility. This is doubly so given that, as a foreigner, I am not familiar with this area *en Suisse*.

Twenty minutes later I step off the bus, it is its last stop, and I walk to a small hotel where I had made a reservation earlier that morning.

And in the chalet:

After I check in I sit on a backless bench placed against a wall in my room. It is smooth and feels nice to the hand. It is made of cedar. The whole room smells of cedar. This makes sense; the walls and the floors are also made of cedar. So I sit there for a while and I take in all the cedar smells. The room smells heavy, it smells musty. Hints of a sauna's odor.

The bed, though deemed a "double," consists of two twin beds pushed together. If I were the type of person who preferred to sleep right in the middle of the bed, I would

have to sleep on two cushioned edges forming a long crack. But I am not, and so I don't particularly mind, and in fact I am used to this sort of 'bed' (more accurately 'beds')—I have seen its kind before.

And I think: *This is a nice smell* all the while sitting on the room bench, aimless, hands planted on my legs on my *jambes*. Everything in here is very still; there is no hand making any of the room's contents budge. The dog forced to leave the patch of grass *pas aux Alpes* does not exist here. *Ce n'est rien*.

My head starts to grow lighter. As if there is in fact a current, microscopic, invisible to *me* to *my* eye, sweeping me up in its soft (invisible) but cold arms away from the bench, into the brick of this room's air, now only able to smell cedar, a heavy musk that drowns my nostrils.

The smell makes me feel faint and I now am nauseous.

*Hey! Stop smelling that! Hey! Stop inhaling this!*

I run out of the hotel and have a cigarette. "I can inhale this."

*"C'est absolument necessaire."*

I explore the area:

The street goes north and is an uphill slant from where I stand. Brown splotches of houses dot the road's edges; there is no room for any possible individuality. They roll upwards, becoming more faint in their painted distance, away, over there, they are no longer houses but simple lines only a shade lighter than the Alpine mountain they meet. Everything is dampened by the melting snow. I hang the image on a wall.

Though it is not that cold, an invisible chill chews into my body and shouts to me that I “*have, in the lapse of this brief walk, succumbed to the frost. have become chilled down through to the tail of your spine.*”

My next goal is quite clear: find any kind of café and get a drink.

Still I wander. Despite having a newfound objective set in course, despite now having purpose—I am going to a café! I am going to have a beer! Une bière!—despite now being a dark splotch on a muddied street *en Suisse* being pulled forwards by some invisible hand *en Suisse en Suisse en Suisse*, I meander, I walk slow, and for absolutely no reason at all I walk almost with a limp. En Suisse! My hands, in accordance, hover in relaxed fists in front of me as if holding timidly onto a rope. I don’t know why I do this. I look at the shops with a sudden interest, unexplained.

One shop in particular:

Its specialty resides in gnome figurines. They are plastered to the window wearing various Christmas outfits (not in season), and seem to be shoving one another for a turn to suffocate the glass. Good thing it is closed, otherwise I would go in.

So I keep dragging forward, with my hands still lingering in front, fingers occasionally giving into sharp spasms, flashes of twitches that call to mind the flashes of handsome teeth from Clark Gable.

Clark Gable now winks.

I wink back and a man walking by gives me a strange look before walking past me with an increased pace.

En Suisse!



Aux Alpes!

Three figures emerge from a side street:

A man of about forty-five walking two dogs. The dogs are small—they are French Bulldogs—and walk ahead of the man. In a curious fashion:

*Do you see that!* I shout.

Whoah! Hey! They are *not on leashes!*

The dogs trot ahead of the man with their tongues hanging out of their mouths. Although they are very small with short legs, they are muscular and must jog in order to maintain their leading position. These are physically very dense dogs. The man resembles their anatomy; he is of stout build and it is apparent that he is quite strong. I imagine he could lift up both dogs—shapely bricks—at the same time, one in each hand, stretching them far above his head, and giving them a good shake as he dances with the wind that the French Bulldogs create in their helpless gestations.

He is bearded and slightly graying. He wears a short black watch cap that makes his flushed ears stick out. There is a vague outline of a smile in his face's thick bush, and as we pass he flashes me nondescript teeth, but, I find him handsome in spite of this, because his greeting is unexpected and because he seems full of vigor and health as he walks his wild French Bulldogs down the descending road aux Alpes, a light brushstroke amidst dark lines.

But it really is a shame—:

The French Bulldogs! They are freed, they are unbound to another, yet they make no requests to stop and ponder the dirty snow surrounding them. They are mindless slabs

of muscle and flesh, they do not even seem aware that they allow their jangling pink tongues to hang out of their mouths, like a naked child will stand before an elegantly-dressed crowd (*en Suisse*), ignorant that his slouching penis hangs in between himself and the gathering.

Anyways, they walk past me *et puis ils ne sont rien*.

I find an open restaurant—bland in its exterior—and walk in.

Inside it is small and very crowded. A traditional German band plays directly in front of the entrance: each one aged in their late-fifties, each one sized quite large—not like the man shaped like a brick, who is condensed and compact—but perhaps more like merry bears outfitted in green lederhosen, white shirts fitting too tightly, and matching green hats. One man, the biggest in the group, plays the accordion while singing incomprehensible lyrics. He spreads his arms back and forth back and forth back and forth with each scratchy note as his fingers wedge themselves between the changing keys. His mouth is in a perpetual state of orgasm that quivers his jowls and many chins. Sometimes the corners of his thin lips give slight way to a smile, but then he catches himself and pulls them back in, to resume an oval. He has very red cheeks that only enhance visibility of the pimples sitting there. His forehead is a little drizzled with sweat.

Because of their size, entering the restaurant is difficult.

I must crawl around them.

Tables stuffed with customers etch around the performing group. In this way there is not much difference between them and the Christmas gnomes, and I wonder if, like the window glass, this band feels suffocated. But it is apparent that the idea of being cramped

disturbs no one (in fact it seems that this has not even entered anyone's head), everyone—and really absolutely everyone, band and staff included—are drinking. It is hot in here and in general the crowd bears flushed faces as people laugh and shout over one another

*Hey!* I shout to the room, "I'd like to sit somewhere." But no one sees me amidst the band members; I stand in between the accordion player and a fat woman playing guitar. She sings along with the man, both unaware that I have managed to find myself trapped in the middle of their set:

Their eyes are closed. Smiling as they juggle harsh sounds of that native tongue and I do not understand I do not understand

I do not understand how I am able to just get a waiter's damn attention in here.

*Bitte! En Suisse! Nous sommes en Suisse!*

But nobody hears me, the vibrating air sweeps up my cries in its fleshy and hot arms carrying it away from any waiter's ears aux Alpes, and smothers it happily, and with a whiff of drunkenness, in the waves of the music.

I keep moving further in:

Body now sideways I slide around the accordion player, careful not to disturb him, and move between a music stand and a flautist. I concentrate hard while doing this so I do not mess anything up—now I really do want to remain invisible—but in the process and with my focus glued elsewhere, my hands mimic wide-angled feet and, if just for a second, one brushes the female guitar player's white hair.

She stops playing and immediately my hand is tossed upwards by her head moving to look up at my now astonished eyes.

I am caught!

Those female eyes of heavy German-tongue:

They are all-seeing!

Menacing!

But then wait—something happens:

The eyes—at one moment shaped as glares, but in this next instance they curl into half-moons, and she laughs! She laughs! And at this point everyone has stopped playing their instruments and their tongues and they poke their now sharpened, their reawakened eyes at my person, and I am paralyzed, but they poke as in jest and from the first crack of her laughter they all join in for a German choir of lederhosen bellows.

A waiter pulls me into a tight booth adjacent to the band, where I order une bière blanche s'il vous plait (a restaurant specialty and recommended by the waiter), and a side of smoked trout and bread. The beer comes as a liter but the trout's head is at least separated from its body so that I am able to move it far away from my eyesight.

I stay there for a long time and leave when it is late. When I return to my hotel it is quiet but I am not yet tired so I flip through various television channels from the cedar-ed-comfort of the little room bench.

The next morning I flip through the Alpentherme's spa menu.

Aux Alpes!

Leukerbad is known for their mineral baths. Everyone says that I *must experience this*, so I give in I am pulled in to their billowy enticements, their promises of eternal pampering.

The catalog contains imaged examples of what I may expect from any of their offered services:

Pages of youthful men and women with clean faces, handsome teeth flashing from the seltzer-ed mists of the poolside, well-breasted figures face down on massage tables as a pair of floating hands soothe the tensions of their tanned hides. All bodies free from the ties of clothing.

Here is one image:

A man with handsome<sup>1</sup> teeth and winking, naked chest, it is expertly chiseled. Stands in the distance of a cavernous sauna holding a towel. He looks towards the camera —*Hey!*—at two females, also naked, also both expertly chiseled in their skin, winking their mouths to each other and also secretly to him. They are closer to the camera lens. They are completely drizzled in sweat, meant to look like sumptuous dewdrops. I wonder what some men might do with this picture in the bathroom.

Un Jet d'Eau.

I ring up the concierge and make appointments for a couple of the Alpentherme's services.

And later I walk along the side of the road, muddied snow flashing underneath my feet. Occasional car passes by.

Today's weather:

Mild; forty-four degrees Fahrenheit, partly cloudy. *Hey!* Warm enough to not wear pants to wear shorts

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<sup>1</sup> See "Clark Gable," pg. 15.

*Hey! En Suisse! These legs have been tucked in for a while now, eh?*

and a terry-cloth bathrobe bred of spas. And that shouts to people, *Hey! I'm going to a spa! J'irais au Alpenthal!*

There are people also walking along either side of the road, some even meandering into the middle of it, and they each all nod their heads but keep with their own shouting and flashing legs. Most look like confused pillows or marshmallows, in their white robes and papery calves, and I am now one of them. Only the dogs look natural, appropriately bundled in dark furs and loose pink tongues, as they drag their human burdens. Drag their respective adults.

Then very quickly I arrive at the spa, the Alpenthal, aux Alpes en Suisse, and I stand just outside the sliding doors, unsure of what to do; I face only a long cement tunnel. In the distance, where it turns, there is only darkness, whereas my back is to the light and is comfortable remaining there. My mind shouts *Hey!* but I quiet it and walk forward and play along with each sharp turn, every now and then a small sign plastered to this long hallway, essentially a garage for walking, these signs explaining where to go, but these signs written only

*AUF DEUTSCH*

in German.

I am timid but I keep walking. The tunnel finally leads to a high-ceilinged cave, there is now only an elevator and I take it to the first floor, solely because I do not know where else to go.

Doors open, reveals:

Pastel-colored walls (made from cement) with high ceilings. Most are made up of a worn-out yellow tint. Like the dirty exterior of a drive-thru. Large abstract wall art. Very large. Incredibly large. Mosaics of black lines and red and yellow circles, varying in width, varying in positioning, varying in height and verticality, varying in size.

Description of one of these walls:

Teal painted, pastel hue—maybe, then, a mint-green color? (Or is it just faded?) Hosting one of these abstract nineteen eighties murals. The black lines are not necessarily lines—rather, they are soft-edged shapes, some curved, a few resembling waves. Primary circles placed in random succession. Loud reds and yellows; these contrast with its muted surface in a very unsettling way. Grotesque. Nostalgic for something I have never personally experienced, nor been witness to an adjacent existence: reiteration of the nineteen eighties, now a cruise ship. Cocaine-fueled fun surroundings.

### *L'Alpetherme*

For a minute I soak in everything else encapsulated in these pastels:

Standing here against a pale pink partition—

Lost.

Lost amongst the here, this *en Suisse* concrete labyrinth built of euro-kitsch

I am a dark streak misplaced inside an Easter egg; those festive sugary marshmallows stand puffed up all around me. Their harsh-white limbs contrast and cringe against the ugly soft hues that are painted all around us.

*Allo!* What is this:

—It is a pastel ship made of spas!

Now I stand with shoulders slightly hunched forwards; I am determined; I am going to find out where the hell I am supposed to go!

So I stand with my shoulders hunched in front of me, and I look straight ahead and I look to the right and to the left head, mean, beady eyes peering like an overwhelmed dog—

And *Hey! En Suisse!* I kiss the moon and I step up to a front desk where there is a suited man and woman shouting to each other in German *Nous sommes en Suisse!* they both stop talking and look at me, wide-eyed for a moment, before sweeping me up in their fleshy and hot arms carrying me away from the tunnel's ears au Alpentherme, and strip me of pampered robe with a flash, and, like a peeled carrot into a pot of boiling water, dump me into the waiting mineral bath.

The water stretches up to my chin with wet hands slightly sticky but it *falls back into itself*. I am still tied close to the pool's steps and I look out at the different gatherings of swim-suited bodies, shouting, echoing, shouts held in various tongues; now I am wide-eyed and silent and I look back for the lobby man and woman but they have already disappeared,

*ici, ils ne sont rien.*

Submerged benches, metal fastenings, skirt the pool's edges like weeds along a wall, many people sit here. The backs are jets so that vats of bubbles sweep the sitting individuals up and Up and Up and Up as if the baths are drowning them.

These bodies are no longer individuals—in the bath's foam they become soggy and whiter, like pillows or marshmallows, but like wet pillows like wet marshmallows.



They are sitting ducks. As they purify themselves in the healthful seltzers of the Leukerbad baths, they lose their flesh; they become phantoms with only splashes of their echoing voices, carried by le vent de les Alpes, felt on my face as a mist or a sticky residue.

Hearty bellows to the right of me:

A circle of fleshy builds, thick-skinned people. Bubbles gush around them, enveloping most of their bodies. Skin reddened and puffed from the water. But they do not seem to mind; they are very much engaged—bewitched by—with one man in particular, talking.

They are all smiling and gazing at him as he tells them this story:

Two buckets of flesh for male breasts, a blonde mustache as makeup for an equally abundant face, move to the shapes of vowels foreign to these winds.

—*Hey!* Plus he speaks in shouts!

A business endeavor *en Suisse* (on his part, he is a business man, here in this instant he is attempting to schmooze these German schmucks; he doesn't feel too rotten about this, no not at all, in fact he is actually quite all right in doing this—*En Suisse!*).

He is naked without his cheap suit but he still has his tongue.

He is American.

And those male breasts:

(They jingle with the man's rapid gestations.)

He speaks to the crowd:

*I'm telling you, I ate so much on that cruise that—no, I didn't get seasick—no but instead I ate so goddamn much that I had to lie down on one of those little benches just outside the restaurant, right then and there. Left my date sitting there like a goddamn confused bird, beak hanging open and everything.*

—Here the monologue temporarily breaks to allow for collective laughter—

He takes the opportunity to smooth down his moustache with two red swollen fingers, wets his lips.

Now he continues:

*Anyways, so I was lying there on one of those little goddamn benches for about twenty minutes, when finally my date gets smart and gets up from the table and goes looking for me. Well, it doesn't take her long, and she walks right up to me, hands on her hips like I owe her an explanation or an apology or something, and she's huffy and mad as hell, and I'm just lying there on one of those little benches looking up at her, feigned innocence, and here I really just throw in the towel, I can't lie to that face. So I tell her, Look, you've got a great personality and all, but I can't help myself, I'm a man—it's just that you look like a dog, and I probably shouldn't have ordered those clams, because I feel sick as hell. Then you wanna know what happens next? I lean over the edge of the little bench, and I throw up then and there, right at her feet. Had to pay a hell of a lot extra for another room just because she wouldn't even stand to associate with me after that.*

*Heheh.*

Then all of them together:

Heheh.

Whew That's A Good One.

I look away.

And I, in turn, am engorged with these waters and I feel light and dizzy, like when I inhaled too much musk and cedar in my room, but there is a difference:

Then, I still had agility; I was able to make an escape.

Now, I am dragged down and Down and Down and Down into the bowels of the mineral bath and I am too heavy to make even the slightest movement.

Alas! I am too lazy.

There is a mist, here, that sweeps over everything and one, and I myself am included—but do I mind? Right now, no. My mind erases, it drowns into the water's mists.

Me:

What I have become!

I am an engorged sponge lost in these blanched-yellow confines.

If I am a pillow, then I am a dirty pillow if I am a marshmallow then I am a slowly-roasted, faintly golden marshmallow.

A lump of air.

I am on the threshold of coddledom!— a toy dog whose shocks of matted hair have been broken.

Finally I emerge from the seltzer waters and shake myself off of this lull. Big droplets hit a few bathrobed people near me, reclining on pool loungers. One man is

asleep, Thomas Pynchon book spread out against his stomach, when he is hit; the splash wakens him into a bout of spasms. He makes an accompanying involuntary sound upon thrashing his body:

“Whah-huh...ah!”

He looks around, he is confused.

Another victim, sharp woman, angular in every feature, is definitely pissed off from being touched by my body’s seltzered water, angler fish. Razorblade glances, she glares in my direction. Now she rolls her eyes. Huffs. Loud ones.

En Suisse! I Am What I Am!—What can I do?

I do nothing.

I pick up a huge robe from a tall cylindrical tub, a vat, so to speak, of luxury (complimentary use of bathrobes). I breath out. Healthful seltzered-waters excrete from my awakened pores. Purification!

Now sated. Combed, combed over, tied down with a leash with the weight of a one-size-fits-all terrycloth bathrobe. Burdened, I lie down on one of the pool chairs adjacent to that pointed woman, angler fish, a new friend (Or, a desired).

I attempt to converse with said angler fish:

Notice, here, that she and I are both in reclined positions—camaraderie! It is a way in.

—A way in!

So, I turn my head in her direction, and at first, here, in this moment, I am unsure of what to say. How, Where to begin? Initiate? Attack?? So, instead, head turned in her

direction, in this moment I stare at her. Mouth open, gaping. That is all I can do. Like a curious dog. Temporary mental-collapse. But not failure. No, not just yet! Inspiration lunges:

Light bulb overhead flashes!

An idea!

Eureka!

Then I smile.

Directly at her. One of those sideways, goofy smiles. Endearing.

Not saying anything to her.

Now I show her some of my front teeth. Exuberantly! Behind her head I can see Clark Gable winking at me *Winking at me!* so I wink back at him, and over her head. A small laugh coughs out.

Now the angler fish is looking back at me:

Uneasy. Her eyes are positioned to reflect that she is perhaps uncomfortable with my stares, my smiling presence aimed right at her face. But maybe only perhaps? Perhaps she is actually initially only confused, but after the lapse of a few seconds she is now encouraged by my quiet confrontation, she is responsive. Perhaps? Eyes shifting now away from me, as if feet were sliding along the edges of a wall, trying to escape.

What!

My eyes now turn from sweet and inviting to confused, grabbing, perhaps grabbing with too much pleading friendship, I now gnash my teeth, only so slightly, and bark,

—*Don't leave!*

But those metaphorical feet keep edging away along the sides of some pastel wall, edging away from me! until finally her eyes have strayed so far that first her head must follow, and then the rest of her body. She swings her legs over the side of the pool chair, over the side not adjacent to me, she stands up, collects her things and wraps herself up, tightly, before walking away at a very hurried pace and disappears through the huge sliding doors.

My angler fish swims away.

And I remain where I am, seated, probing dog, my dorsal flesh slowly sinking in between the chair's plastic lines, mouth open, an abandoned puppy.

Defeated, now cowering into my plastic chair, I rest my head on my paws and tuck my legs up close to my torso.

Upon waking up I realize that it has grown darker outside, and that it has been time for my spa appointment for the past fifteen minutes—

I am late!

Like the angler fish I gather my things hurriedly and rush out of the pool area.

I am getting a facial:

I take the same elevator up to the second floor, doors open to an empty room and I step out. I walk in the only direction possible, until I am greeted by a cedar side table carrying a very large fern. I turn and keep walking, feet echoing along the bare walls.

I make another turn:

I see a dark figure standing at the end of the room.

As I approach she slowly turns to me:

*Hey!*

She has been waiting for me; *but I am only a few minutes late.*

Plump hand reaches out to me and is now my guide through this luxury maze and it pulls me forward, *dragging me forward* and again I feel like a dog on a leash, but she is my host, so I oblige.

*En Suisse!*

She pulls and drags me forwards and then, when we reach the room, Up and Up and Up onto the cushioned table where I must quickly close my eyes so that they do not burn from the therapeutic mist now spraying at me.

I bite at the wind coming from this, I gnash my teeth, they are no longer flashing and encouraging winks, but are now snarling and wild. She probes and pricks my face, then squeezes until it feels as though blood and puss have been wholly aborted from underneath my skin, not choosing to come out of its own pleasurable accord; it does not feel like un Jet d'Eau nor an ejaculation but instead like a wire hanger inside and pulling.

So I fight back! My teeth bite and my head writhes on the table.

But they are defeated!

Defeated by her strong hands, she has me chained to an invisible leash that she *not once* lets hold of, she is heedless, she keeps dragging my skin out, and she does not hear my pleas.

*Mais, qe'est-ce que cet?*

*Ce n'est rien.*

En Suisse!

Now I am a contestant in a dog show, a poodle, and she pulls my jowls this way and that against my bites, exposing my dulled fangs, she is not afraid. She trims my whiskers and tortures my hair. She makes me tame, I must sit and be still, and complacent as she fluffs my ego.

I howl but she is heedless, she is a tyrant.

And when it is over I am nothing but a soft ball, and she sweeps me up in her arms quietly, and with a tone of defamation, dumping me into the mineral baths.

I again start to swell and drift into a lazy mist.

But no! I must still fight back! This place is poisonous!

So I flee to the top of the mountain:

Enter the only means of getting there, the gondola; it is crowded and we are all dogs stuffed in a cage.

Up and Up and Up en Suisse—

I crawl out of the gondola, a mangled sight, a speck of dust amongst other beasts, clawing out of their cage and into the vast room of the top of an Alpine mountain.

*What a rock!*

But I do not have fur; I have only this bathrobe that I thought could be worn *all over* Leukerbad, the spa-town, but—no. Chill sweeps deep within my skeletal veins so I claw at the shelter of the only operating building on the mountaintop:

A building.



A combination of restaurant/café and visitor's center. There is also a corner table set up for selling gifts.

Everyone from the gondola, now sitting, shouting, ordering food, eating food, drinking beers. Turtle-necks bulge as liquored contents stream down throats. I join them, I too want something to drink!

*Je veux quelque chose pour boire! (S'il vous plaît.)*

A waitress arrives with beef stew and a mug of mulled wine. She is like the stew: Grey, watery, uneven where bits of meat sit. She sets down the food, grunts, she knows I do not speak German, and then disappears back into the kitchen's bosom.

The wine comes in a souvenir mug with a fat man dressed in typical Swiss-German attire, ready for the snow. He grins. He flashes white mug-colored teeth at me as I take sips from the top of his head.

I swear he now winks.

I start back in my seat.

“Help!”

But my shouts are ignored, and people exchange grimaces with one another; no one believes that the man on my mug just winked at me, they think that it is only the wine speaking, that I am drunk.

I may be a little tipsy.

Well fine!

That's OK, I shout back. I don't feel too rotten about this, actually, it's all right. So I toss the due francs on the table and I flee outside to look out and over this huge cliff.

*And really, it is a magnificent thing—really—What a rock!*

There are dark blotches there, in the distance; they are brushstrokes too small to be seen in that painting, but they do not stand near me. Some just wander around in the powdered snow, aimless, not sure what they are doing here but they are here because it is a mountaintop aux Alpes.

And in front of me:

That huge dip, a valley, Leukerbad. It is a series of dark uniform lines.

And huge and all around:

*Rocks!*

Les Alpes!

I flash teeth to nobody and I howl, I am finally free!

J'suis un sauvage chien!

And my arms dance now with the wind above my head, and they are both so happy together like this that they do not shout back down to me to say *Hey! Nous sommes en Suisse!* laughing, the wind sweeping up my voice in its mineral bath charm, before dumping it into Leukerbad.

*Hey! En Suisse! Je suis en Suisse!*

“I am alone.”

Despair now fills my lungs and I realize that I am crying that je suis en Suisse, aux Alpes, avec personne and why is that? I look around me, frantic, mais il n'y a personne et personne n'est pas partout à moi.

*Je suis tout seul.*

And now scared, I throw off the covers that I'd let be my shield, a wild mask, and  
I run back to that un-adoring couple en Suisse, *en Suisse, en Suisse*; I run back to them,  
crying, and I throw my arms around their necks! and I shout,  
“Maman!”