

Flypaper

Tangle-foot flypaper is approximately fourteen inches long and eight inches wide. It is coated with a yellow poison paste and comes from Canada.

When a fly lands on it - not so eagerly, more out of convention, because so many others are already there - it gets stuck at first by only the outermost joints of all its legs. A very quiet, disconcerting sensation, as though while walking in the dark we were to step on something with our naked soles, nothing more than a soft, warm, unavoidable obstruction, and yet something into which little by little the awesome human essence flows, recognised as a hand that just happens to be lying there, and with five ever more decipherable fingers, holds us tight.

Here they stand all stiffly erect, like cripples pretending to be normal, or like decrepit old soldiers (and a little bowlegged, the way you stand on a sharp edge). They hold themselves upright, gathering strength and pondering their position. After a few seconds they've come to a tactical decision and they begin to do what they can, to buzz and try to lift themselves. They continue this frantic effort until exhaustion makes them stop. Then they take a breather and try again. But the intervals grow ever longer. They stand there and I feel how helpless they are. Bewildering vapours rise from below. Their tongue gropes about like a tiny hammer. Their head is brown and hairy, as though made of a coconut, as manlike as an African idol. They twist forward and backward on their firmly fastened little legs, bend at the knees and lean forward like men trying to move a too heavy load: more tragic than the working man, truer as

an athletic expression of the greatest exertion than Laocoon. And then comes the extraordinary moment when the imminent need of a second's relief wins out over the almighty instincts of self-preservation. It is the moment when the mountain climber, because of the pain in his fingers, wilfully loosens his grip, when the man lost in the snow lays himself down like a child, when the hunted man stops dead with aching lungs. They no longer hold themselves up with all their might, but sink a little and at that moment appear totally human. Immediately they get stuck somewhere else, higher up on the leg or behind, or at the tip of a wing.

When after a little while they've overcome the spiritual exhaustion and resume the fight for survival, they're trapped in an unfavourable position and their movements become unnatural. Then they lie down with outstretched hindlegs, propped up on their elbows and try to lift themselves. Or else seated on the ground, they rear up with outstretched arms like women who attempt in vain to wrest their hands free of a

man's fists. Or they lie on their belly, with head and arms in front of them as though fallen while running, and they only still hold up their face. But the enemy is always passive and wins at just such desperate, muddled moments. A nothing, and IT draws them in: so slowly that one can hardly follow, and usually with an abrupt acceleration at the very end, when the last inner breakdown overcomes them. Then, all of a sudden, they let themselves fall, forwards on their face, head over heels; or sideways with all legs collapsed; frequently also rolled on their side with their legs rowing to the rear.

This is how they lie there. Like crashed planes with one wing reaching out into the air. Or like dead horses. Or with endless gesticulations of despair. Or like sleepers.

Sometimes even the next day, one of them wakes up, gropes a while with one leg or flutters a wing. Sometimes such a movement sweeps over the lot, then all of them sink a little deeper into death. And only on the side, near their legsockets, is there some tiny wriggling organ that still lives a long time. It opens and closes, you can't describe it without a magnifying glass, it looks like a minuscule human eye that ceaselessly opens and shuts.