



Extract from LADY ALICE

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FEET

Architecture has collapsed. Architecture rises again. Building has begun in between. Tall houses supported by limitless wooden scaffolding. Slender black shapes go up against the sky, carrying something, sitting down, rising. Even here below the sky, it is densely populated. The city is covered. Things are allowed to hang, laundry is integral to the houses and the curving and bending space between them, nothing is in one straight line, everything is lines, everything is full of materials. Much is built in mortar and stone, but much is also just put there, secured, and a plate can easily be replaced with another. Do you have a plate? Do you know anyone who has one? Irregularities and grass coming up, breaking the sand. Garbage hangs downwards to the stream, the brook or the sewer drain. It lies squashed in the soil, against the ground, beneath the ground, bottles are flat objects, little bas-relief of glass. Old cases for mobile phones, bags, bottle tops, orange peels, a handle from a wheeled suitcase, flat stepping stones in the city. Animals crawling up and down between them, little insects and lizards, some with speckled spines and some with burning heads. There is a lot of sand here. Roads, asphalt, kerbs, holes and accumulations. Navigating feet, feet in flip-flops, feet in high-heeled shoes, feet in closed flat leather shoes. Through unpredictable terrain, adapting, holes in the road, an edge suddenly cut off into the roadway. Sewer holes and drains, the stony hills of small streets. Landscapes. I see the most with my feet.

MUSEUM

A woman protects the future, a goddess displayed in one of the first exhibition cases we pass in the ethnographic museum on the hill in the outskirts of Kinshasa. We are going up there to see if we can find Lady Alice in the courtyard. I find out that women are celebrated in Congo, and that Women's Day on 8th March is a gigantic party for women; all mothers, all sisters, all women are so happy, Jules explains, because a big party is thrown just for them. The museum space is dark and small, and we look at objects without any other context than Africa. A guide tells us about villages and traditions, about fertility masks and battles. Jules has returned to his teaching and we need him. Suddenly too many details are lost in the sound of the French language that I do not understand. Not well enough.

We go outside and gaze across the Congo River; broad and watery like a green fiord. We have been permitted to take pictures because the Academy has telephoned our approval in advance. Two long wide boats sail on the edge of the river, close to the green grass. There must be people in them, but they are too small for me to see clearly. We turn around and walk to the backyard. There is a fallen statue of Stanley and a long heavy iron boat. It is bolted together and evidently marked by blows and bruises. It is full of holes and in several places it is cracked.

It is not Lady Alice, the museum inspector tells us, but it is one of Stanley's boats from one of his other expeditions. Lady Alice, the one Søren is looking for, the wooden boat, is not here. It has never been here. Presumably, it has perished. He does not know more than that. Søren takes pictures of the boat and the fallen statue of Stanley. We only really understand when sitting by the side of the road below the museum. Understanding comes with the salty chicken and the cold beer down our throats. The guards stand by the end of the road in the shade of the trees. At first they watch perseveringly but after a while they start to walk, from side to side, they become blind dots between the sun and the shade.