

**John von Düffel, Der Schwimmer (The Swimmer)  
from: Wassererzählungen (Water Stories)**

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“In any case, it’s a wonderful pool, natural stone, as if hollowed out of a boulder. Narrow of course, basically only one lane, but over 25 yards long, across the entire width of the panoramic bungalow. And the water! You’ve never felt water like this, so soft, unbelievably soft on your skin, your tongue, and chlorine free, naturally. There’s no need to worry if you happen to get some in your mouth, or swallow any. It’s healthy spring water, straight from the mountain stream up above it. Purest melted snow, mixed with water from a hot spring 300 meters under the mountain, extracted through a deep geothermal drilling. That way you have hot and cold, very hot and very cold, combined in a large mixing battery underneath the pool house. You won’t have any sense of this mixing from within the pool, no hot or cold zones. The temperature is kept at a constant 21 degrees centigrade, not as warm as a bathtub, but refreshing, just right for you to make it two hours. I mean, where else can you find 21 degrees in a mountain lake? And that is really what it’s like, like swimming in a mountain lake.”

“Two hours?”

“Exactly, at sunset. The pool and the bungalow face southwest. You can watch as the sun sets from the pool, as it dips below the horizon, the shifting colors in the sky and in the water. Imagine that you are diving in an exquisite, sparkling lake in the mountains, blue green on the backs of your hands, on your arms, as you start to swim, and a few laps later, you are somewhere completely different. It has become warmer, yellow, orange, rosy, blazing red, depending on the evening sun. In two hours’ time, you have swum through practically every color of the rainbow. That had to have been the idea behind the design. At least, it’s too beautiful to have been an accident. It’s truly unbelievable, sometimes the water changes from one lap to another...”

“So, you’re only supposed to swim at sunset, not in bad weather or the rain?”

“It’s funny you ask, since that was my first question, too. But something very special happens when it rains. It’s as if the rain, as if every single raindrop, reacts in a very special way with the mountain lake water. It tingles. Yes, the mixing of these very different kinds of water—the hot mineral, the ice-cold run-off, and the falling rain—sets off a kind of tingling, a bit like carbonation, full of little, sweet-salty explosions. It’s literally a bit salty, the water that is, did I tell you that? Because of its mineral content. And so when the rain comes and sweeps across your back, there are all of these little drop explosions around you and - oh, you’ll see. If you’re lucky, very lucky, it’ll rain for your first time.”

“And all I have to do is swim?”

“Precisely.”

“Really, just swim?”

“Yes.”

“I still don’t understand why.”

“You have to imagine that it’s the same principle as with an aquarium. Imagine that this mountain pool—we’ll just call it that—is a large aquarium that doesn’t yet have anything in it. No one is going to look at an aquarium that doesn’t have any fish in it.”

“Who’s going to look?”

“No one. What’s important is that something swims in it.”

“Yes, but -”

“A pool needs movement, life. Even you wouldn’t want to be around an empty aquarium, day after day.”

“No, of course not, but - why doesn’t he swim himself?”

“In his aquarium?”

“You said it’s a pool, a mountain pool!”

“Dr. No doesn’t swim.”

“Dr. No?”

“Only a nickname. Please, that needs to stay between the two of us.”

“Yes, but why ‘Dr. No’?”

“Never mind, forget what I said. Excuse me.”

“Is he Japanese?”

“No comment.”

“But you’ve already said that he’s an architect, a hotshot Japanese architect, right?”

“No comment.”

“You said that he developed the concept, the idea with the colors of the rainbow. And if he builds a greenhouse like that with a pool -”

“I never said ‘greenhouse’!”

“If he’s ingenious enough to build an architectural bungalow like that on the side of a mountain, then he must be famous in his field.”

“I said ‘panoramic bungalow’.”

“Sure, but that sounds a lot like architectural pretension.”

“Someone can just be an aesthete.”

“Aesthete?”

“With a sense of beauty for its own sake, for its own utility.”

“So Dr. No is an aesthete who’s looking for a new fish for his aquarium.”

“Listen, if you don’t want -”

“I haven’t said that. I just want to know why.”

“Can’t we first just discuss what you have to know, and then turn to what you want to know?”

“I thought that all I had to do was swim...”

“Yes. In an aesthetic way.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Beautifully.”

“What does ‘beautifully’ mean?”

“Oh, come on!”

“No, really, I want - I must know. How am I supposed to please our employer if I don’t know what he has in mind in terms of ‘beautiful swimming’?”

“Okay. Symmetry is important, a kind of golden ratio of movement. Speed doesn’t matter, nothing like your best times or anything, but - how can I put it - what matters is the conquest of time through repetition, if you know what I mean...”

“I understand repetition.”

“And that ‘s just the point. You must repeat the same sequence of movements over and over again, nothing else.”

“And that’s supposed to be beautiful?”

“It’s timeless.”

“Well, I’m not sure if I’m capable of swimming timelessly...”

“It will become timeless, when you swim the second lap exactly as you swam the first one, and so on and so forth, by eliminating any differences between the preceding and subsequent laps. All perfectly uniform.”

“I’m not sure if I can swim perfectly uniform.”

“Sure, you can. All you have to do is concentrate.”

“Two hours long.”

“It pays well. At the end, an envelope will be waiting for you in the pool house. Assuming that you swim beautifully.”

“And if not?”

“You shouldn’t think about that.”

“Two hours...”

“To be precise, it will be two 55-minute swims. The duration of each swim will last only 55 minutes, then the water has to rest for five minutes. I trained once in the Olympic pool in Tokyo, in the run-up to a competition, and it was just like that. Five minutes before the end of the hour, everyone had to get out, even the long-distance swimmers, whether they wanted to or not. It was tabu to be in the water for the last five minutes. We always stood around the edge of the pool, laughing and making jokes, along the lines of: During these five minutes, the Japanese count their dead.”

“So he’s Japanese.”

“Who?”

“Dr. No!”

“Stop it! Of course, you aren’t supposed to stand on the edge of the pool and joke around. You have to stand very still and show your respect to the water, your gratitude, for five minutes.”

“And you did that?”

“Not in Tokyo, as I said, but at the mountain pool, yes, absolutely.”

“It never struck you as odd?”

“Somewhat unconventional, at first, but I later found it was proper, respect before the element and gratitude after the swim.”

"What won't one do for money?"

"That's not the point!"

"No?"

"Or not any more. At first, I did it for the money, sure, but over time -"

"Over time, you enjoyed swimming while Dr. No - excuse me - the 'aesthete' ogled you through his panoramic windows?!"

"It's not like that."

"He didn't stare at you?! Are you telling me that he pays you to swim - to beautifully swim - in his pool without him watching you?"

"Ogling and watching are not the same thing!"

"Oh, and why do you think he spends so much money, if he doesn't get turned on by you, your body, the way you move? Why should he commit to such an expense if your aesthete is not really a damned voyeur?"

"It's not like that!"

"Is he always alone during it, or are there guests too? Does he throw noisy parties in his house? Do all of them stand around in their evening gowns and tuxes, cocktails in hand, while they watch you, while they laugh or get aroused when you -"

"No!"

"Or cameras? Are you sure he hasn't installed cameras all around the pool, in the pool, in the changing room, in the pool house, as you call it? Maybe he spends the whole time sitting in front of his monitors and consoles, zooming in on you, so that after nightfall, he can cobble together his perverse sex films."

"Stop it right now!"

"How naive are you really? How naive do you really think I am?"

"Listen to me right now!"

"I've been listening to you this whole time, but I have the feeling that you have not been completely honest with me, and so I'm slowly beginning to wonder if you are simply hiding the truth from me, or if you have even admitted the truth to yourself!"

"It's not what you think. It's simply not what you think."

"Then what is it?"

"It's not about sex, or anything sexual."

"Is there something you can see through?"

"See through?"

"Through the windows. Can you see through the windows? Can you see him while he sees you?"

"I concentrate -"

"At least his shadow? His silhouette? You have no idea when he's at the window and when he isn't?"

"I concentrate on swimming, as I said!"

"And after you swim, when you 'thank' the water? Can you see him then?"

"That's when I thank the water, I -"

"You can't see through the windows."

“Why should I?”

“Because a man is standing behind them, and you don’t know what he is doing with you, your image, your appearance ...”

“I don’t understand why this is so important -”

“Because he’s watching you without being seen, he can do anything he wants behind his mirrored windowpanes. And you’re trying to tell me that this has nothing to do with sex!”

“They aren’t mirrored.”

“What?”

“The windowpanes. They’re tinted, not mirrored.”

“What difference does that make?”

“This isn’t the CIA or NSA. It’s only a bungalow with tinted windowpanes, due to the sun exposure on the mountain. And, no, there aren’t any parties, sex orgies, cameras...”

“How do you know?”

“I just do.”

“How?”

“I know what I need to know.”

“And that’s enough for you? Someone is playing God, watching everything, knowing everything, has total power over you - and you just play along? You comply with all of it?”

“I was never treated badly, never.”

“Why won’t you tell me the truth?”

“It is the truth! I was never treated badly! I-”

“The truth is that you are selling yourself! He buys you for the time you are with him and you swim for him. He pays you, and you do what he wants. It’s just the same as if you pole danced for him or stretched out on a couch, like in a peep show -”

“It’s not a peep show!”

“It is just like a peep show. He sees you, but you can’t see him. He pays, and you satisfy his yearning, his curiosity. Let’s call things by their real names! The truth is that you sell yourself, your body, your image, and the only suitable word I know for this is prostitution.”

“Alright, that’s enough now, I -”

“Are there many others like you?”

“What?”

“Does he have other girls?”

“That really is enough.”

“Does he have other call girls?”

“We are not call girls!”

“Ah, so he does have others.”

“No!”

“So who are ‘we’?”

“We?”

“You said: ‘We are not call girls.’ Who are we?”

“Well, you and I, that is, I thought we were ‘we,’ I and you as my successor, although it now looks -”

“Then you’re always alone, I mean, alone there, evenings at the pool.”  
“Yes, if you really have to know: I arrive alone, swim alone, and leave alone.”  
“You don’t meet anyone else?”  
“No.”  
“Nobody? Not even Dr. No? You don’t see him? Ever?”  
“No!”  
“And who lets you in?”  
“I go to the gate, press the button on the intercom, identify myself, and the gate opens automatically.”  
“That doesn’t make it any better.”  
“What?”  
“That there are no witnesses.”  
“Witnesses!”  
“You are alone, you said, I would be alone. That means he only calls for one in at a time.”  
“No one calls for us! We aren’t call girls!”  
“Who is ‘we’? You said ‘we’ again!”  
“Well, I and whoever my successor is -”  
“Who was your predecessor?”  
“Predecessor?”  
“You had to have had a predecessor, or are you the first?”  
“No. No, I’m not the first.”  
“Okay, well, what’s up with her?”  
“Why do you want to know?”  
“What’s up with her?”  
“Nothing.”  
“Is she dead?”  
“No! Why would you think that?”  
“Can I talk to her?”  
“Why would you want to talk to her?”  
“Perhaps she would tell me the truth.”  
“I am telling you the truth!”  
“Who is she? Do I know her?”  
“You can’t talk to her!”  
“Why not?”  
“There is an unwritten law. We don’t talk about it, we maintain our silence.”  
“Otherwise?”  
“‘Otherwise’?”  
“What happens if you break your silence, this law? What has he threatened you with?”  
“No one has threatened us. We simply don’t discuss things, out of respect and -”  
“And ‘gratitude’ -”

“Out of respect and gratitude, yes, whether you believe it or not, except when we pass on the position, understandably. And even then, we only discuss the most essential things. I’ve already talked too much.”

“Did your predecessor tell you less when she passed the job on to you?”

“It’s not a job, it’s -”

“Of course, it’s not a job. It’s a mental blow job.”

“It’s an office.”

“An ‘office’?”

“Yes, a kind of holy office.”

“There’s no way you believe that! The whore as saint, the temple prostitute and hetaera. Tell me, in which time period are you living?”

“I’m not going to say anything else.”

“I’m gradually coming to doubt you.”

“I’m not saying any more.”

“I want to talk to your predecessor, today - that is, if she’s still alive.”

“Of course, she’s still alive! Why would she not -”

“Something is wrong with her!”

“Why would something be wrong with her?”

“Is she doing well?”

“I don’t know!”

“I could go to the police...”

“To ask if she’s doing alright?”

“If she’s dead.”

“She’s alive - how many times do I have to say that? She lives further out somewhere, in a community on the edge of the city. All I know is that she got married and became pregnant. She might have already had her baby.”

“Did she have to stop because of that?”

“What?”

“Because she got pregnant? Was her stomach too noticeable?”

“No, that happened later.”

“The pregnancy, or that it was noticeable?”

“Both, I assume.”

“Then, it isn’t his child?”

“Whose?”

“Dr. No!”

“If you won’t give it a rest -”

“And at just the right time, you came on as her successor, slender, trim, not pregnant. You aren’t pregnant, are you?”

“No.”

“So why do you want to be swapped out?”

“I’m not being ‘swapped out’.”

“Are you too old for him? Does he want someone younger? Or simply something new?”

"I'm not being swapped out!"

"You quit voluntarily, right? Why don't you want to stay? And why should I want what you don't?"

"Listen, I'm sorry. It was a mistake, my mistake. I thought it might interest you, that perhaps you were the right one. I was wrong, I shouldn't have asked you in the first place, forget it. Just forget it."

"But why?"

"You don't want nor do I want to convince you. We'll just let it go."

"But I do want to. I never said that I didn't."

"You said -"

"I only said that I want to know what I'm getting myself into. That means that I'm interested."

"You're interested?"

"I wouldn't ask if I wasn't."

"You want to be my successor?"

"Yes, definitely. I want the job - or the 'office,' if you want to call it that."

"Because of the money?"

"Should I lie?"

"No, no, it's okay. At first, I also did it for the money."

"And a little because I think it will be exciting to be a pool hostess."

"Well, 'pool hostess' -"

"That's what it is, what he wants, if we are really honest: a swimming hostess for his mountain pool."

"I would sooner say -"

"Only without sex."

"What?"

"You said, only swimming. No touching, right?"

"Definitely."

"Or did he touch you? Did he want to sleep with you?"

"No!"

"I just want to know so I can be ready. I want to know what I'm selling for what price."

"You mean you would do it, if...?"

"If the price was right."

"You would sell your body?"

"We've been talking about this the whole time."

"I wasn't!"

"No, not you, you've danced around the subject, but I have."

"I never said that you were supposed to sell your body!"

"You said it was like an aquarium, only Dr. No doesn't want any fish in his pool, he wants a swimmer. Unfortunately we can't be bought in a pet shop, and the purchase of young women and their abilities is still -"

"I never meant it that way."

“That doesn’t mean I won’t do it. Assuming, the price is right.”  
“That’s not the way it works!”  
“Everyone has a price.”  
“You know what, let’s just drop it.”  
“Drop it?”  
“I’m sorry, but I really think we should let it go.”  
“You don’t think I could satisfy Dr. No?”  
“That’s not the point.”  
“You don’t trust me?”  
“No, I was just mistaken, my fault.”  
“What’s wrong now? You can’t just retract it all now!”  
“I’m not retracting anything, I haven’t had a good feeling about this all along. And at this point, I’m sure that - I have come to the conclusion that it’s not right.”  
“I’m not the right one?”  
“I haven’t said that, but -”  
“You said that you had believed I was the right one, and now you say it’s not right. That means I’m the wrong one.”  
“True, you aren’t the right one.”  
“Why?”  
“We shouldn’t go into it.”  
“I’m not good enough? In your eyes, I’m not a ‘worthy successor’?”  
“Please, believe me, just believe me.”  
“I can do everything in the water that you can, everything. And out of the water, well, we’ll see...”  
“It makes no sense.”  
“Dr. No won’t complain, I won’t give him any reason to, trust me!”  
“That’s not the point. Forgive me, but - the answer is no.”  
“No?”  
“No, unfortunately.”  
“I would like to speak with Dr. No personally, to introduce myself. He should be the one to decide if I’m right or not.”  
“Absolutely not.”  
“Give me a chance.”  
“That won’t work.”  
“I only want one chance.”  
“You already had it.”  
“How? This here - this conversation with you was my chance?”  
“Yes, each swimmer picks her successor.”  
“And why didn’t you tell me that!”  
“I’m telling you now.”  
“Why won’t you tell me what I did wrong?”  
“It doesn’t matter.”

“What did I do wrong?”  
“Nothing, I just don’t have a good feeling.”  
“With me.”  
“With the all of it.”  
“But you did all of it, without thinking, only with me you suddenly have a bad feeling -”  
“Yes, dear God, yes! I don’t have a good feeling with you.”  
“Okay...”  
“You wanted to know, so now you know. I don’t have a good feeling with you, period.”  
“Because?”  
“It just doesn’t fit. Believe me.”  
“Because?”  
“Because I know what it’s about about, and you don’t.”  
“Then explain it to me!”  
“There’s no point.”  
“Because I don’t understand.”  
“Because we obviously don’t understand each other.”  
“Because I’m too dumb.”  
“You aren’t dumb.”  
“You understood it, I don’t understand it, that means that I’m too dumb to do so.”  
“You aren’t too dumb, it’s the attitude...”  
“I don’t have the right attitude?”  
“As I said.”  
“I can change it.”  
“No.”  
“But of course, I can change my attitude. What should I do? How do you want me to be?”  
“Stop it.”  
“Do I ask too many questions?”  
“Let it go!”  
“Am I too direct or awkward for you and your aesthete, or too -”  
“There’s really no point.”  
“I wanted to say, too ordinary. I’m too ordinary for the job, the office. Your ‘high office’ is too high for me, right?”  
“You know absolutely nothing.”  
“Was it the sex? Tell me, please. Did I talk too much about sex?”  
“No comment.”  
“I knew it. You don’t like it when someone talks about it...”  
“No comment.”  
“If I got too close to the two of you, I apologize, but I thought sex was part of the job description.”  
“It’s not about sex or anything sexual. I told you that from the beginning!”  
“And I didn’t listen to you but kept talking about ordinary, unaesthetic sex! Pardon me.”

“Could we change the subject now?”

“Did I do it again? I’m sorry.”

“You always have to drag everything through the mud! You always have to break everything and drag it through the mud! The whole time I was a swimmer, I never felt as dirty as I now do after talking to you!”

“That wasn’t my intention.”

“If you think you have to prostitute yourself, if you are open to doing anything for money, then please, go for it, but don’t lay any of this on me. I haven’t done anything like that and never would because I’m not a slut and never was. Do you understand me now? I’m not your pimp!”

“I didn’t mean to -”

“And I won’t stand here any longer and let you insult me, do you hear me? I won’t let you sully me and what I have done - done with respect and gratitude - any more!”

“I didn’t mean to say or imply that, but -”

“Not everything is about sex, just because it is in your case. We aren’t all perverts, even if you think we are!”

“Buying a swimmer for his pool - if that isn’t perverted, then what is?”

“Don’t talk about things you don’t understand! Stop talking about buying and selling when it comes to the things that are above you! Don’t drag everything down!”

“I’ve just had some bad experiences.”

“Is it really so unimaginable, so unthinkable for you, that in life there might be something else, some third thing, beyond sex and money?”

“I’ve had some really bad experiences.”

“And why? Have you asked yourself that?”

“No clue.”

“Because you always take the worst for granted! Because you only see the ugliness, not the beauty. Nothing beautiful can ever happen to those who can’t see beauty. By default, only the nastiest of things happen to them!”

“Yes, probably.”

“Definitely! And it won’t get better if you keep acting like this. You’ll keep ending up in the wrong situations, having bad experiences, worse and worse ones actually, because everything you go through simply confirms your own perceptions.”

“Well -”

“And you will search for guilt everywhere, in someone or another, anyone who has done something to you, you will shove the guilt onto them after you have assumed the worst of them. The only thing you won’t do is look for guilt in the one person whose fault it is - you. You are to blame for the meanness and ugliness in your world!”

“I - I’m guilty?”

“For the meanness and ugliness in your world.”

“That’s rough.”

“That isn’t rough, you just need to finally admit it!”

“And if I’m too dumb?”

“You aren’t dumb.”

"But I am. And ordinary."

"That's an attitude. With this attitude -"

"I'm trash, and all that happens to me is trash, it's true. Totally true."

"You have to get break out of the vicious cycle, that's it. With your attitude, you won't ever escape the cycle!"

"I spoiled it. I assumed the worst of both of you - the doctor and you - and now something bad is coming back around again. That's typical, so typical for me."

"Because life has disappointed you."

"You could say that."

"Because life has disappointed you a couple of times, and now you are in competition with all the other disappointed people to see who among you is the most disappointed, so you can say you know exactly how it is, since you know the reality. That's what you mean by reality, a mere fantasy of your collective frustration, a form of punishment that functions as an award among cynics, because there is no greater happiness than be proven right about the depravity of the world. And you are never mistaken because you have banished all beauty from your world, because for you there are no more possibilities of anything beautiful! And that's how you want to live? You want to keep this up forever?"

"No."

"You don't want to be a cynic among cynics any more?"

"No!"

"Then there is only one thing to do - you know what I mean."

"I? No, tell me, please. Help me."

"You need help?"

"Yes."

"That's the first step, you know."

"Really?"

"To admit that you need help, that things can't keep going the way they are and you need help, that is the first step."

"Is that good?"

"Yes, that's good. And then the second step follows the first..."

"And what would that be?"

"This one's not so easy. The second step is harder, much harder than the first, but it's a question of attitude, of readiness. Are you ready?"

"I'm pretty ready, to be honest."

"It's a mental issue. The second step is connected with the attitude itself, with faith."

"Okay."

"The actual problem isn't one's disappointment with life. The problem is: you don't believe."

"Yes, that's part of it. I don't believe in anything, not a single thing."

"Wrong - excuse me my bluntness, but that's wrong! That's not just part of it. That's the reason, the root cause. You lost your faith and settled for your world's presumed depravity. And

in order to escape this, there is only one course: you have to slowly, very slowly learn to believe again!"

"Well, I have completely forgotten how."

"But you can relearn it. It's not easy, it's hard, very hard work - I know what I'm talking about. But if you really believe you can, then you can do it."

"Do what?"

"Believe again."

"In what?"

"In beauty. In yourself."

"I can't do that."

"Of course, you can!"

"I'm weary."

"You think you're weary, but you're really just disappointed."

"I'm actually very weary."

"Once you start to believe, you will be strong again, you will be refreshed, revived!"

"Does the doctor say that?"

"I say it."

"And you did it?"

"You can too. With a little good will..."

"Yes, I can! I want to believe, so very much, in what you do, only... It's not the same, I'm afraid, it's the exact opposite, not faith but jealousy. To be frank, I - I'm jealous of you."

"I was like you."

"What?"

"I was like you."

"How 'like me'?"

"At the beginning. When I started, I also didn't believe in anything, I just thought about the money. It was hard work, as I said. It lasted for a very long time, many hours in the pool, many sunsets, much rain, so much beauty, until..."

"I can't do it."

"I thought that as well, and I became impatient, grew depressed, quarrelsome, all of that, but then -"

"And if I'm not the right one?"

"You are the right one."

"Do you really believe that?"

"It's not wrong to doubt. It took a long time with me, until... until I could once again believe in beauty. There were moments when I was swimming that even I did not think were possible. I swam, in two senses of the word, I lost every support, every assurance -"

"Exactly!"

"But even that can be swum through, this time. I just kept swimming further and further out, in perfect uniformity, and then I felt it. I experienced how there was something else, a third thing, beauty, and how I could perceive it."

"And you're sure that I.... that I too -"

“Earlier you asked if I was touched or grabbed, remember? And I said that no one touched me or grabbed me, and that is the truth, but the truth is: it grabbed me, it, do you understand, touched me, the belief, the sense for beauty.”

“Yes?”

“And I am certain that it will also grab and touch you, at some point, if you only swim long enough.”

“Alright then.”

“And the crazy thing is that through this touching you will become untouchable. Once again you will experience your weakness, your need for help, your guilt, you will be at the bottom, very small, and then all at once, after some time, you will be lifted by the strength of your belief. Your weakness will be transformed into strength, your guilt into innocence. You will be inviolable!”

“And he really never touched you, the doctor that is...”

“No, I told you. He didn’t, but it did!”

“There’s no sex involved at all, right?”

“It has absolutely nothing to do with sex. It’s about the opposite!”

“The opposite of sex?”

“Cleansing. The point is that you will be washed clean as you swim.”

“Yes, of course, I clean myself if I’m swimming, only -”

“In a figural sense, in the sense of catharsis. Or purification, as we say. We say ‘purification’.”

“We. That would be you and your predecessor...”

“And my successor, which I hope will be you.”

“I?”

“Assuming you really want to be.”

“So very much so!”

“I mean, to get better...”

“I can’t tell you how much I want to be better! A better person!”

“Through cleansing and purifying yourself.”

“I will do everything to purify myself. I want to be purified, like you!”

“You shouldn’t do it for us, understand? Do it for yourself.”

“Yes, yes.”

“It has to do with innocence, it has to do with reacquiring innocence through the only possible means.”

“Through the opposite of sex...”

“Through purification, exactly.”

“And that’s what I want! I totally want that!”

“It’s not a competition, that’s not the point, to be better than someone else. The point is to improve yourself. Do you understand that now?”

“I believe so, yes.”

“That’s beautiful. You said that so beautifully.”

“What?”

"That you believe. You said, 'I believe'."

"Yes, I really do believe. I am starting very slowly to believe again."

"That's so very beautiful."

"Then... you've given me your word on this?"

"Beautiful! Isn't our language beautiful? 'To give one's word,' that's beautiful, isn't it?"

"I mean, we're in business, right? 'Business' isn't nearly as beautiful, but you know what I mean..."

"It's not business!"

"No, but you know what I mean."

"We won't discuss it. We won't talk about sex and business anymore, are we clear? We will maintain our silence, understand?"

"Yes, yes, silence, absolutely."

"Good."

"It's not like I always think about - you know. I just always think that it's expected, that it's expected from me. I don't need it myself, don't even really want it. I just want to swim, that's all."

"And purify yourself."

"What? Yes. And purify myself, etcetera, the exact opposite of sex."

"The thing we don't want to talk about anymore."

"Right, silence. Swimming and silence. That's all."

"And you're not just saying that? You really believe what you're saying?"

"Absolutely. I will come alone, swim alone, leave alone - wonderful!"

"You've understood."

"Thanks, yes. Thank you."

"Good."

"I... I've learned my lesson."

"Very good."

"Well then... Do I need to sign something?"

"No, no. We've given each other our words, as you said so nicely already."

"Yes, of course, but something in writing..."

"Don't tell me you don't believe me!"

"No, no, it's just what I'm used to. Of course, I believe you - and me."

"Beautiful. Well, to beauty!"

"To beauty!"

"Then, there is a third step: from belief in beauty into beauty itself. That's where the gift is, the third thing, the thing you can't buy, which is priceless. In this, the body in belief moves beyond itself, transcends itself into beauty, into pure beauty. But no worries, the third step is the easiest, the most logical, the most inevitable. Once you have been through steps one and two, the third step simply follows, the self-transcendence over everything."

"Okay."

"Yes. All you have to do is start to believe, swim and believe."

"Well, then..."

"Nude, of course."

“Excuse me?”  
“Because of the cleansing.”  
“Did you just say ‘nude’?”  
“Because of the boundaries of corporeality which must be dissolved.”  
“We swim nude?”  
“Of course, not in a figural sense. You won’t feel naked, only at the start perhaps, a little, but then the opposite! You will feel how you transcend your nakedness.”  
“Okay.”  
“Do you have a problem with nudity?”  
“No, no, not at all.”  
“It’s for aesthetic reasons, for transcendental reasons.”  
“No problem. I understand.”  
“Great.”  
“Then that is all I have to know?”  
“In principle.”  
“When... when do I start?”  
“When the sun goes down.”  
“Today?”  
“In two hours. Does that work?”  
“Uh, okay, no problem.”  
“Alright then... swim beautifully!”  
“Uh... how do I get in?”  
“I will take you. Today. For the first time. Perhaps in the rain.”  
“And tomorrow?”  
“Tomorrow just ring the bell on the intercom, say your name and that you are coming for me. In my place.”  
“That’s easy.”  
“Yes, that’s all. Otherwise: silence, don’t forget!”  
“Of course, that’s... that’s a given.”  
“By the way, one more thing. When you have transcended yourself and become untouchable in your nakedness, you understand...”  
“Yes?”  
“When you have reached the point that you can truthfully say that you believe in and can see beauty, this point from which there is no moving forward, and you want to stop...”  
“When I want to stop, yes, I understand...”  
“There is only one requirement before you can: you have to find a successor.”  
“A successor?”  
“Yes, a girl, a young woman, a swimmer to take your place. You must convince her - with everything that you have learned, through your belief and conviction. Only first then have you really finished.”  
“I have to -”

“You must pass your belief on to her, the kernel of your belief, just as I have passed it on to you, so she follows in your footsteps. We call it ‘consecration’.”

“I have to convince her to swim for me?”

“Not for you, but in your place. Then she will do it for herself, for her own benefit, that is, assuming you have convinced her.”

“Yes, but -”

“You must give her the chance to liberate herself from the whirlpool of cheap cynicism and disappointment.”

“You’re saying that if I want to stop, I first have to -”

“Rescue a person, yes.”

“Rescue?”

“From the vicious cycle. You must first rescue yourself and then someone else.”

“Oh, I... I don’t know.”

“First then will you be free, truly free.”

“Okay, but I don’t know if I -”

“Oh, I’m sure that you can. You’ll be able to, when the time is right.”

“Yes, but when the time comes, who?”

“You will know who the right one is, when you have reached that point.”

“Then you knew from the start that you... that for you, I...”

“That you would be my successor?”

“Yes.”

“No. I didn’t know it, I couldn’t know it...”

“But?”

“I believed it.”