

## Cartographies

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Maya Sonenberg

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- 1 Originally published in *Gargoyle* and reprinted in *Cartographies* (winner of the Drue Heinz Literature Prize, 1989 ; University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, PA, 1989 ; pp. 3-21).
- 2 It has always been this way with the mapmakers : from their first scratches on the cave wall to show the migration patterns of the herds, they have traced lines and lived inside them. After a meal of scorched meat and a few hours of fitful sleep in the smoky corners of the cave, they felt the antelope trot through their arteries, then crept out into the night and followed the tracks, so intent on the pursuit that they missed the hoots of the night birds calling to each other in the grasses all around them. In Babylonia, suzerains hired them to draw maps of fertile valleys with sharp sticks in clay tablets, showing the streams and the well-worn paths between the plots of grain. Then the scribes and planners dropped their sticks to follow the paths in single file or hand in hand in pairs. Ptolemy called for their assistance with his eight-volume *Guide to Geography*, asking them to copy neatly his list of 8,000 places. At their tables in the library in Alexandria, the names they scribbled called up wide expanses of blue water, the colored sands of different ports, the movements of whole navies across the Mediterranean, the flags flying at the boats' sterns, the cracked tooth in a sailor's mouth. In the New World, the mapmakers painted a plan of Mexico and a map of the gulf whose waters they had never seen. Montezuma gave these to Cortez so the conqueror could travel more easily from one island to another, from one tiered temple to the next, and thus, charts facilitated the demise of one empire and the birth of another. Swords slicing easily through brown skin, Cortez's cavalry thundered through the jungle, and the mapmakers ran into the uncharted depths of the trees and vines to escape. In 1554, Mercator rolled the earth into a cylinder, coaxing it between his palms, sticky, like a ball of clay. As he spread it out flat, his apprentices watched the continents fall squarely into place. In themselves they felt the lines draw taut, parallel and perpendicular. Ever more accurate, maps are now made with the trimetrogon process. A plane flies at 20,000 feet, and wide-angle cameras photograph the terrain from horizon to horizon. Under the bright office lights, the mapmakers lean over and cast their shadows on a flattened world, photos that show the tiniest details—houses, cars, people, dogs—seen from above, bits of skin on the earth. In

the future, they will watch from orbit, trace continents with lasers, and spin the globe on their computer screens. When the mapmakers walk out into the night, they walk out into the map, but the city has risen around them and the black buildings block their view.

- 3 “Imagine we visited Canada together,” one mapmaker says to another. Her eyes sparkle in her still face. “Wouldn’t you expect it to be pink?”
- 4 Across the glass coffee table from her, he is playing with his key chain, throwing it up and catching it again as it nears the gray rug.
- 5 “First we would see the Horseshoe Falls,” she says, “all that blue water tumbling over the edge and shading to purple where the deep pink of the rock showed through. In our carnation pink slickers, we’d join the honeymoon couples and go down the deep magenta tunnels behind the falls. We’d emerge at the railing and catch the spray full in our faces. Through the gaps in the wall of water, we could peer across to the American side where everything would look green.”
- 6 She watches the pale oval of his face tip up and down as he tosses the keys, and she extends her arm tentatively over the table. Her skinny fingers hover, flick away some soft dust that’s settled on the arm of his chair, and she withdraws her hand. He pitches the keys to her and she flings them back as if the metal were hot, laughing. Jangling, the keys flash copper and leave red marks in their palms.

*To make a map of your favorite mountain, climb that mountain, walk around it, follow the ridge to the neighboring mountain, look back at your mountain from above and below, walk back along the ridge, climb down the other side of your mountain.*

*Next, go to the nearest airport and hire a pilot and small plane, or maybe a helicopter to fly you over and around your mountain.*

*Take pictures from the air.*

*Remember all the details you’ve seen, the angles at which you’ve placed your feet, the places where it was so steep you had to hold on with your hands. When you get home, make a model of your mountain out of red clay, using the photographs only if you have to.*

*Flatten it.*

- 7 He steep himself in the maps he makes and thinks that they, in turn, are immersed in him. He thinks the coastline of South America overlies his liver, the streams line up along his veins. Cars travel his nerves as they travel the interstate, their drivers following the route of his thoughts. The oceans fill his abdomen. His muscles are the earth, and if he were to stroke his cheek, he’d brush the treetops of Tanzania. He takes the world printed flat on a parchment and folds it into his brain.
- 8 When he walks down to Washington Square, it seems the brick buildings have been pulverized, and the view is unobstructed. He sees the numbered side streets ranking north and south and the ordered avenues ranging east and west to the rivers where the ships are secured to the docks and the barges ply the waters. He sees other people also walking to the fountain in the square. Their hands are in the pockets of their loose-fitting clothes and their heads thrown back to look at the sky. Walking inward from Thompson Square, from Sheridan Square, from Madison Square, they follow the grid he follows, and he feels that as he walks he pulls them along. Among the others, he can see the woman he is going to meet. She wears dark glasses and stares at the ground, sensing where to turn rather than looking. She doesn’t realize that the sky above her is blue, hear the trucks rumbling or the scattered car horns in the distance. Perhaps she takes the network of cracks in the asphalt and superimposes that on some other system of branching lines like the wrinkles under his chin, and perhaps she follows those lines in her mind as her body

follows the streets. In his brain, all the people proceed to this center, the square, leaving their trails behind them like snails' slime : a map of the city.

- 9 In the park, men dance under the arch and lounge on the benches, but he notices only the woman standing by the fountain, her back to him. Against the white spray the outlines of her body are sharp ; her dark hair, her tan legs and arms, her blue-and-black checked dress are like a paper doll's, she stands so still. He approaches, breathing quickly, wiping his hands down the thighs of his pants, anticipating how her body will take on substance as he touches the shoulder of her dress that's partitioned like the city. She may be startled, but he'll never know from her static face. She'll never know that, with his touch, he's just created her flesh.
- 10 "Imagine you're a sailor on the high seas," he says to her. Leaning back against the thin pillow, he clasps her hand with his, holding it tightly. His voice is hushed by the dark, muffled by the buzz of the air conditioner. "At night, you lie on the pitching deck which is hard and smooth and cold beneath your back. It's a dark night—no moon—and the smell and taste of salt are everywhere, as if sodium is the commonest element. But you're used to that ; you barely notice it any more as you barely feel the wind that pushes you across the Atlantic or hear the creaking of the timbers or the slosh of water against the sides of the ship. These things have become constants. Above you the stars are out, bright dots, hard to look at, hard to hold on to, but if you stare long enough, you begin to see faint lines between them like those you've seen on the maps—constellations.
- 11 "You're a young sailor learning to navigate, hoping to rise from sail hauler, knot tier, deck scrubber. You are learning to read maps. The one of the stars presents few problems. It's just a matter of recognition and memorization, for you can imagine spreading the night sky out flat on a table ; it's not a matter of faith. Navigational charts have become this for you—a matter of faith. They baffle you. How do you know those soundings are correct ? How do you know some island and its surrounding ledges and shallows will not appear in front of the ship one night, unforeseen ? You tell yourself that you must trust the map, the mapmaker, the navigator who has traveled this ocean before, over and over you tell yourself, but you're still not sure.
- 12 "As you lie on the deck amidst coils of rope, you try to imagine the corrugated contours of the ocean floor—the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, the Canary Basin—as you saw them in the blues and browns of the topographic map that was unfolded, its creases flattened, on the table. You wonder which of those formations you are many fathoms above now. They say there are mountains down there as tall as the Rockies or the Himalayas. You wonder what good that map of the ocean floor does for you except that, should the ship go down, you'd at least know where you were. If the wind were to rise suddenly and bury the ship under a wall of water, you might be able to give the fish directions to the Sargasso Sea. But it wouldn't happen that way : you scare too easily. Pretend to be in control when you're not. With your eyes closed, you'd keep reaching for the mainsail line long after the mast had snapped.
- 13 "Trapped between two maps, moving along the grid of a third, you lie there on the cold deck. Parallels run east-west ; meridians run north-south, you tell yourself, with the stars swaying above and the water below."
- 14 The blanket traps their heat, and she moves to throw it back. His arm, though, lies across the quilt, a weight like a string of pearls around her neck. She sits up, frees herself from the tangle of sheets, and his hand slides down to her lap.

- 15 “You can’t sleep,” he says, reaching toward her back, the ridge of her spine running neatly down the center.
- 16 When she stands, she slips into the cool air as if it were a satin robe, stretching her arms, flexing her wrists at the ends of the sleeves. “Obviously.”
- 17 She turns off the air conditioner, opens the window, and hot air drifts in with the sweet smell of exhaust. Leaning on the sill, chin in her hand, she watches the traffic light switching red, green, red, and a man running under the streetlamps with his dog. Their steps ping-pong over the metal basement doors, bouncing up the street.
- 18 Through the window the light spills around her, puddling on the floor, and the fronds of her fingers curl toward it. She rocks slightly. He was buoyed up by her body and then sank, pressing her down under him with the heels of his hands.
- 19 When she turns back to her room, the other mapmaker is sucking in his stomach, buttoning up his pants. Shadows fall around his white body like bars of sunlight running through water.
- 20 If he can read the maps of cities, the maps of stars, of seas, of sedimentation, he can also read the map of the human face. He has memorized the charts of thought and feeling that compartmentalize the face and label the distortions possible in each quadrant. The other mapmaker—she’s the one exception to these plans. The nerves to the surface muscles of her face are damaged, and she can neither smile nor frown. He can read the damage in her constant calmness and in the scars of her numerous and ineffective operations where the doctors peeled back her skin as if they were peeling fruit. At times he tried to read her eyes, but he soon learned that it is the muscles around them and not the whites, irises, and pupils themselves that give expression. And those muscles are isolated in a wilderness without roads. Her features are no key.
- 21 With her, it’s all much harder work. He must ask and she must answer ; she must speak and he must listen. The landscape is between them, but he thinks that she has an unfair advantage, a watchtower at the border from which she can see it all. He thinks she should be able to take him to the interior, to show him the country, following the dry streambeds and the deer paths that only she can see, that she should know him as easily as she knows the color-coded words on the maps ; *his* face isn’t damaged. He does not believe that she finds his face as hard to read as he finds hers. “My darkest Congo,” she calls one cheek ; “My uncharted plains of Kenya,” she calls another. “My Amazon Basin” is his chin ; “My Antarctica,” his mouth. “My Nile Delta” is his brow ; the silt of his too numerous thoughts floats down and settles there, muddying the waters so she cannot see the rock formations at bottom slope into the sea. When she strokes his face with these names, she feels only the smooth, dead surface of a map. Softly, she asks him, “But what do you mean ? I didn’t know you ever needed to pursue me,” and he repeats, “I’m not pursuing you anymore.” He says it thickly. Reaching up to brush back his hair, she slices her finger open on the sharp paper’s edge. From the almost invisible cut, the blood flows freely, startlingly red, and she bends her head to suck it dry.
- 22 The forest is between them. They both approach it so cautiously. Like pioneers intent on staking their own claims, they cut tangential swathes through the trees. When they meet in these dark woods, they do speak, but the words are often jumbled, lost among the cracking branches, the squawks of birds settling for the night. They stand, lean on their axes. He spits out the grass stem he’s been chewing and asks her about the trees. “Yes,” she answers, “just like the ones by the fountain in the park.” But if they were to look up,

they would see trees so tall that their trunks squeeze the space between them to a point. Birds too far away to be seen from below steer between the branches and battle a fierce wind that can't be felt on the ground.

- 23 In the living room a table reaches from one wall to the other, white cloth dipping to the floor, candles poised in their holders. The two mapmakers are giving a dinner party together.
- 24 “You’re here already,” she says as she swings into her apartment, back pressed against the door. He’s sitting at the kitchen table with the darkness closing tightly around him like a glove. She can barely make out his features. Flicking the light switch, she watches him squint those earth brown eyes flecked with green. He has moved the chair from its usual place, shifted it to the diagonal so that he can rest his feet on the other chair, the one facing the windows.
- 25 While she slices dark green scallions on the white counter, he sets the table. First he walks around clockwise with a stack of plates on his arm and places one in front of each chair, making sure they are evenly spaced. Then he arranges wine glasses and water glasses to the right of the plates. He lines up forks and knives so their prongs and blades face off across the cloth, places salt and pepper shakers in pairs at both ends of the long table. Above the plates he lays silver teaspoons down so that all their oval bowls point in the same direction, circling the table like a line of minnows hanging suspended in a stream, like the dotted boundary line surrounding a state.
- 26 When she comes in from the kitchen, wiping her damp, red hands on a towel, the silverware shoots stars through the glasses. She laughs at the teaspoons though. He places the last one down carefully, straightens it, measures the distance between it and the plate with his thumb.
- 27 “That’s not where you put the spoons,” she says. Hugging him tight, she lifts one and places it to the right of the knife. “That’s where it goes.” She kisses him on the cheek and reaches around to untie her apron strings.
- 28 “No. You’re wrong. They go across this way.” He settles the spoon back in line, little silver bowl holding the light.
- 29 “Now, whose mother gave dinner parties for the mayor ?” she says, crossing her arms.
- 30 “And who worked in a fancy French restaurant for three years to put himself through school ?” He picks up the spoon and shakes it in her face. When he leaves the room, the glasses whine against each other. The bedroom door closes ; he starts the rush of water for a shower.
- 31 Sighing, she lays the spoon down again next to the knife. It looks decidedly better there : balanced—the two forks to the left of the plate, and the knife and spoon to the right. But is it worth an argument ? She thinks and puts the spoon back where he wants it. Perhaps it would look right there if they had more silver—three forks, soup spoons and sherbet spoons as well as teaspoons, a butter knife for everyone. She stares at the teaspoon, how it lightly bridges the cloth between two glasses, then lines it up next to the knife again. After a moment, she sweeps them all off the table and takes them into the kitchen. We’ll just bring them out when it’s time for dessert, she thinks.

*To make a map of your favorite mountain, look at other maps of the mountain. Copy whichever you think is the best. When you copy it, add a number of different colored stars and a key to these colors in the margin. “From here, you can see my house in the village*

*below.* “Here is a flat sunny rock to picnic on.” “The water from this spring is especially sweet.” And so on.

*You’ve made the map your own.*

*Next, climb the mountain, taking with you a number of large colored-paper stars. Follow your map and place the colored stars at the designated spots. Or, if you want your map to be inaccurate, place the stars several yards further up the mountain than you indicated. You’ve now made the mountain your own.*

- 32 They sit in the sun, drink bitter coffee on which a milky film has formed. “Yes,” she says to him, “there’s always the problem of Greenland. There’s really no way to get rid of it. Don’t you remember learning about it in elementary school even? It’s part of the curriculum, part of how you learn what a map is. The teacher says, ‘See how the northern part of Greenland, the part that’s covered with a glacier, is stretched out? See how much smaller it is on the globe? That’s because the longitude lines have been spread apart as if the earth were a cylinder.’ The teacher explains how those lines which seem parallel on the map actually curve around a sphere and join.
- 33 “There are solutions for this problem, but these solutions tend to throw the rest of the world out of kilter—the oceans cut up like orange sections, the shrinking of all areas not directly around a pole. We could have a clear picture of Antarctica and of nothing else.
- 34 “Don’t you think that if you were to walk around Greenland using a world map as your guide, you’d have to walk very slowly so that you could mirror the sense of immensity suggested by the map and yet stick to the confines of the land itself? You’d stomp around the inlets and capes along the coast, map in your hand, but they’d all seem wrong, attenuated somehow. On the pier of a fishing village, a young woman would realize what your trouble was and give you a map that showed only Greenland, was centered on the island. You’d refuse at first, of course, wave her proffered bit of paper away, but finally, reluctantly, you’d accept her help and start off again, hopping from rock to rock. In a little while you’d realize that no matter how accurate your map was, the land mass would seem immense in relation to your body. You’d be walking forever.” She pauses noticing how his body is locked tense, leaning forward, and how he’s watching her mouth. He looks the way he did the one time he saw her cry, his eyes rummaging in her face. The tears slid over her cheeks like water over stone. “Do you think you can get away without saying anything?” she asks and rises, dropping fifty cents to the table to pay for her coffee. The silver coins bounce on the white surface.
- 35 She steepers herself in the maps she makes, and they in turn are immersed in her. She absorbs them, internalizes them, whole cities inside her. When she was a child, she played the globe-spinning game with her friends. One of them gave it a push, and then all closed their eyes, rested a dirty finger on the colored surface, and waited for the globe to stop, the friction warming their fingertips. Then they opened their eyes and took turns describing the places their fingers had landed. They told stories about phosphorescent sea monsters that glowed beneath the surface before rising up to devour ships, about a thousand-foot-long snake that took a fancy to a small village, about head hunters who looked for replacements for their wives’ heads which were the size, shape, and color of artichokes, about trees as tall as the Empire State Building with whole towns built among the leaves. Outside, kids raced relays in the yard.
- 36 She still plays sometimes. Waiting for the other mapmaker to show up, she spins the globe and lets her finger trail. She remembers visits to certain European capitals and envisions others. One night, Notre Dame springs up, flying buttresses cracking apart her



living room floor. On the plaza in front, girls clump over the cobbles in their black clogs. She wanders inside where the candles burn steadily.

- 37 When the other mapmaker walks into her apartment from the cool evening, he finds the watery smell of the Seine, the smell of wax. She is curled in a corner of the couch, counting to herself in French. She tells him that in Paris the bees were hovering over the honey cakes in the bakeries, that on the street corners the boys swung their hair out of their eyes, that in the cathedral the choir was practicing “Amazing Grace.”
- 38 “Suddenly in the middle of the bridge to the Left Bank, I realized that everyone was speaking English. In my high school French I asked a young couple why, but they didn’t understand me. They just looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders. They walked around me. No one noticed I was mumbling to myself.”
- 39 He hopes to lull her, to quiet her descriptions of the narrow streets she didn’t recognize, of how it was getting dark and she was reeling, hearing the strangeness of her own tongue. He makes her talk about something else, but he keeps catching her hands that scrabble at his chest and placing them firmly in her lap. Soon, her fingers begin to crawl and scratch again as if she were trying to climb a stone wall in the dark.
- 40 “I saw you on the street,” she says. “I called out, but you didn’t seem to hear.” From the office windows, they watch the storm dump rain over six miles of city blocks. The clouds are dark green ; the edge of clear sky in the west is purple.
- 41 “I’ve been away,” he says, “a little vacation.”
- 42 “Then I looked again, and I couldn’t be sure it was you.”
- 43 He spreads his fingers apart, hands flat on the glass. “On ancient maps,” he says, “the ocean’s far reaches are guarded by dragons. The mapmaker’s home at the center is clearly delineated while the perimeters are hazy. If you were to visit those outer reaches, you’d find yourself sloggng mile after mile through fog, slush, and mud. Around you, you’d sense the movements of the local inhabitants, oblivious to your daze and distress, to the squelching sounds your rubber boots make in the brown mud as you pull one foot free and then the other. You’d think of voracious beasts that could crush you as they rolled over. You wouldn’t be able to see them clearly but only glimpse shapes through the fog.
- 44 “As the mud thins to dirty water, the fog lifts and you have a clearer view of these other inhabitants ranging up and down the coast to either side of you. They stand up their haunches in mud, billowing their white breath, extending their scaly whip-like tails and their many-clawed forelegs, pointing their toothy snouts into the wind. Inside, your heart beats faster and you think of escape to a vaguely remembered shingle beach, but the fog still hides both the sea and the land. You stand still, hoping to avoid attention, but they’ve seen you. They lumber toward you, moving slowly, and each step sends shock waves through the mud.
- 45 “You remain frozen as they come closer. The fog lifts some more and you relax and release the breath you’ve held. They are only men dressed in many layers of animal skin. They’ve been pulling their boats in toward shore and billowing white breath with their exertion. That’s all. You realize you’ve hit this country at a change of season—the air warm and the water still frigid so the moisture condenses and forms fog. You’re on the shore at low tide in an area where the ocean floor slopes gradually down. These mudflats stretch for miles before the waves lap at them. It’s all familiar.



46 “The men come closer, waving oars and harpoons in greeting, but their faces coalesce into grimaces. They stare at your yellow raincoat, mouths dropped open, as if it were the slick skin of a giant amphibian. On your unresponsive face they cannot read your fear. They can’t hear your heart, but you can hear their grunts as they close in, lowering their weapons. The open water is visible now, and you rush in its direction, no hazy edge at all, just the deep, deep, cold, gray sea.”

47 It’s gotten dark. His voice wanders off, whispering. She’s backed away and her heels patter on the floor. In the glass, he faintly sees her fumble to turn on the lamp. The bright circle of light surrounds her as she straightens her stacks of white paper, taps her pencil against her palm. He slides his hand over the cool surface of the window until it lies on her warm, round shoulder. Gently, he strokes the glass. From her desk, the light spreads to his back, fingers the hairs that curl over the pink collar of his shirt.

*To make a map of your favorite mountain, figure out the shape that emerged from the crashing together of the tectonic plates many millions of years ago. Calculate the effects of wind, water, walking, and lumbering on the land. You’ll have to know the airflow patterns, precipitation patterns, vegetation patterns, the history of human settlement and industry, as well as the properties of the mountain rock.*

*Your calculations, scribbled in pencil, will cover sheets of paper, the backs of many envelopes, the margins of a newspaper, and they will look nothing like a mountain.*

*You know how to turn your calculations into diagrams and how to get the vectors to mold the space on the blank paper.*

*Still, no mountain appears until you take the dare and trace its shape, faintly at first and then with bold black strokes.*

48 “Let’s drive to the mountains,” she says to him one day in October as she wanders from room to room, looking out at the rows of windows across the way, all neatly curtained, and the towers disappearing into the sooty sky.

49 “Next weekend OK ?” he asks, rustling his newspaper and glancing up to see the way she nods delicately and leans against the window, holding the curtain aside.

50 Their first morning in the country, the two mapmakers get up early while the sun is still pale on the colored leaves. At the foot of Mt. Lincoln they open the car doors and the cold air shocks them, penetrating their clothing as they stoop to lace their boots. They start hiking, walking quickly to warm up.

51 Clearly marked with blue blazes, the trail is easy to follow but much steeper than their map suggests. It twists up the mountainside and they must often use their hands to pull themselves up. Dirt fills the lines in their palms. The trail crosses a stream back and forth and proceeds through a gorge so narrow it forces them to walk in the water itself, rushing past them, ankle deep. On their map, the stream curves gently down the mountain, a blue line that meanders several yards from the trail.

52 “Maybe this is the wrong trail,” she pants as they climb and climb, their thighs tightening and aching. “Or the wrong map.” She holds out a hand for him to grab ; he pushes her up an especially steep boulder in the middle of the trail.

53 “No, no, no,” he reassures her. “It’s a new map and here’s the South Face Trail—right here—marked with blue. That must be what we’re on.”

54 Their mouths and throats are so dry that it hurts to breathe and there’s nothing left in their water bottles. They scoop cold water from the stream, but it tastes rank like rotten leaves, the fur of long-dead animals, the summer’s dust. On their map, the key promises

good drinking water, a spring up ahead in a clearing. Watching the ground closely to avoid roots and sharp stones, they climb toward it, the image of it in their minds.

- 55 Three-quarters of the way up the mountain, she crumples the map and pushes it to the bottom of her pack. “There’s no clearing with a spring. We might as well step here,” she says. They sit down on a rock and eat their lunch, savoring the oranges, while the golden leaves fall all around and land in their hair. He swings his legs, letting his heels knock against the stone. It is the only sound, and she can feel the rhythm match the knocking of her heart. The valley below lies still in the sun. Through it, a river reflects silver, doubles back on itself, and twists its way between a gap in the mountains to another valley. It reflects the hawks wheeling from cliff to cliff, crisscrossing the valley, and circling the mountaintops, a pattern of brown flecks like dirt. Their feathers fall, float on the ponds in the backyards of the village.
- 56 From the rock overlooking the valley, the mapmakers follow the blue blazes to the summit that’s barren above the tree line, another hour’s steep climb. They must stop every few minutes to catch their breath. At the top, the land opens up, unwraps itself before them, and they turn and turn to see it on all sides. At first they notice only the shapes of the hills rolling down to the roads and up again, following each other off into the distance, fading from the reds of the sugar maples variously turned to hazier and hazier blues. The sun slides over the solids and sets the colors floating.
- 57 As the mapmakers watch, their vision sharpens until they see the waterfalls tumble rock over rock like racers running hurdles, a whirligig spinning and flashing yellow on a lawn far below. In the clear air, wood smoke from a fireplace hangs in dense brown shapes that constantly change. The golden light radiates from every point in the blue sky ; it encircles the mapmakers on the mountaintop and spreads over the dimpled, pocked, and folded earth, over hills unnamed, marked but nameless trails, villages too small to make the map where women peel carrots for soup and young girls drift idly from house to house paying their calls, letting the bushes slap against their hands as they walk.
- 58 As the afternoon sun slips away, houses lose themselves in the folds of the land, streams disappear between the trees. The hills shift in the failing light. The mapmakers can only stand open-eyed and watch ; they are unable even to stutter. Like the coming together again of the continents, the re-forming of Gondwanaland, they feel their bodies line up against each other. She feels that, as her arm winds around him, it circles some stone from the Precambrian period. Through the layers of wood and cotton she feels every muscle, every bone—rock formations before they were riddled with fossils. With his wide, smooth hand he passes over the side of her body, the hills and valleys of a forgotten land. He feels the coursing of underground streams and senses the stillness of underground lakes. They resist speaking to each other or calling out over the valley because, in Gondwanaland, the mountain ranges had not yet been named.