

my cold cuts. The boy went through the numbers and we said, “Dune.” He went through the sky and the forest and the ground again and we said, “Dune,” and he brought us all the way to 86. Then the man in the pith helmet took back the flute and taught us a few more things, including how to convey shapes and sizes, whether a person is old or young, sick or dead, and how to warn someone about an evil presence.

As we did this, “Herbert” came around and stood aside while we listened. At first I had thought he had come to see the man with the pith helmet, but when the lesson had ended, “Herbert” tapped my arm and said, “It is seeing,” and he took me outside.

The night was clear and I pointed up. “La lune!” And I looked at him and he smiled. “La nuit! Avec les étoiles!” But as I looked closer, I could see in the moonlight all the pores on his skin and his face looked very gaunt. I stood back in horror and peered at him, he was somehow smaller.

“Herbert,” I said (with a silent tee and in a voice of awe), “C’est vieillesse?” (Which is to say, “Are you old?” in what I approximated his language to be.)

He said, “64? 65?”

“I don’t know,” I said. “Yes?”

“Oui,” he said. “64. 65.”

He took me down to a cave with lights within. I came to know this room as the “flute box”. It was a place where the men came to mold the new piccolos and it was often crammed with men of all ages. Even the boy came down to work here the next morning. The men had collected some old flutes and melted them down, they would go into newer molds, adding holes and attachments in the process. That night, the recent innovation was a slender point on the open end of the piccolo. In time I learned that this was used to spear fish and carve trees and replaced the jagged metal (usually cut from