

The Suntaster — David Wraught

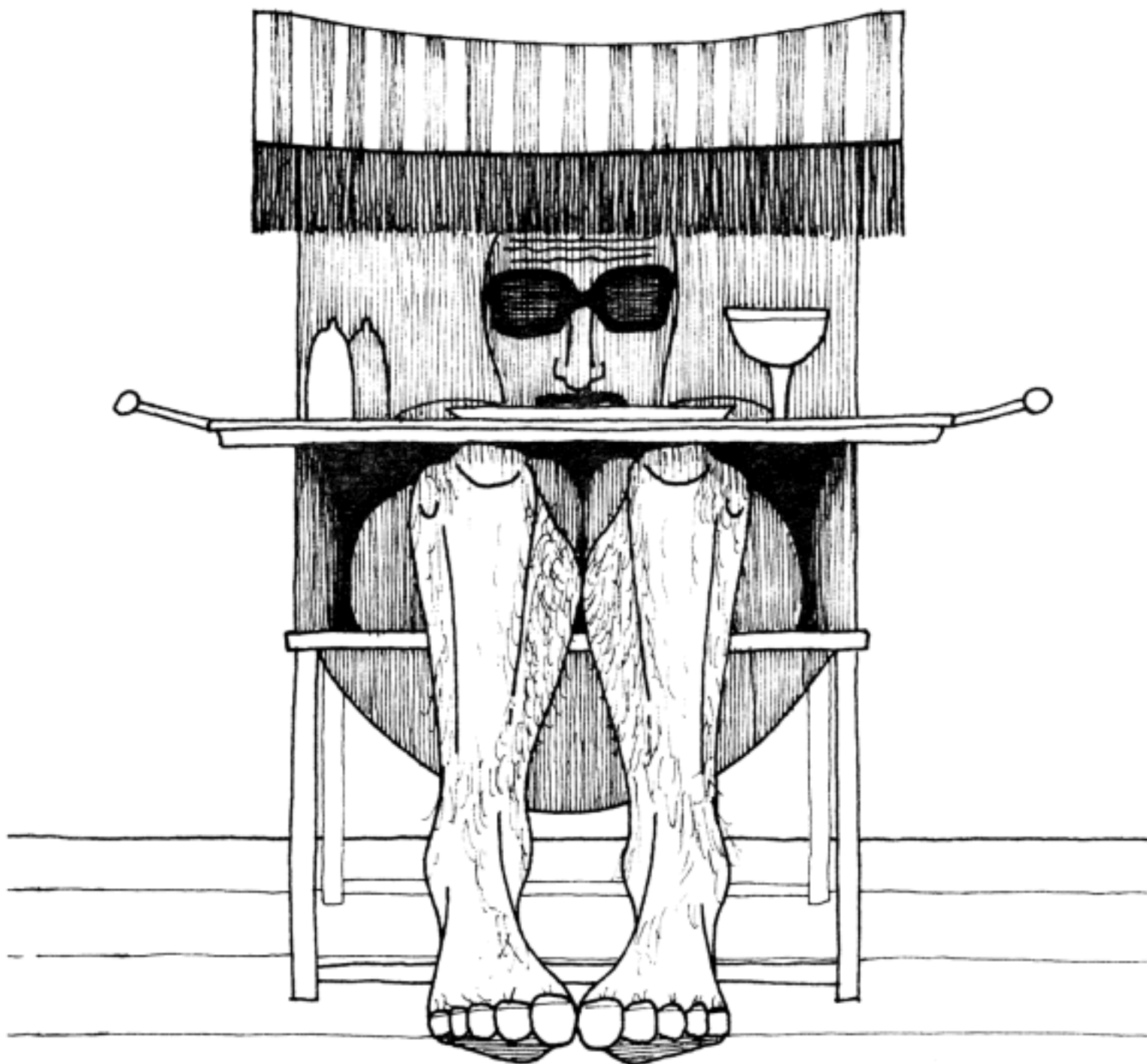
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On Monday morning, the sun shone firmly for the first time since the ship had left the dockland, shrouded in grizzling mist and ghosted with grey shades and crammed, skeletal cranes against a sheet-steel curtain of sky. The next day or two had been no better. The mist had swamped in through every open door and the sea, as if using the mist's fingers, had eked up and salt-dulled the brass work, speckled the windows and portholes with tiny crystals of salt.

But on Monday, the sun shone from a clear blue sky that was deep overhead and fierce. No clouds dared gather in the direct heat and the decks, by ten a.m., were too hot to sustain the passage of bare feet and passengers began to come onto the tennis and stadium decks wearing swimming trunks or bikinis, flapping sandals and sun-



glasses, black-eyed like insects, the sun catching their lenses and giving a small explosion of multi-faceted light, like the compound eyes of large wasps or the backs of glistening beetles, against a pink background of flesh.

Where the wind was slight and the ship's shutters cut it from blowing, the smell of suntan oil and copper-toned fluids reached up the nostrils and fought there with the tang of sea and warmth.

Monday was the first day for the worshippers of heat, the adorers of sun and burnt skin, the moment of annual sacrifice for those who travelled this way every year, to return to the grey docks bronzed, warm and ready to face winter and the envy of stay-at-homes and secretaries.