Recapturing the flies, the mosquitoes and the heat. I stabbed the seductress in the Garden of Eden. 
I turn the handle and the cards begin to flicker - Blank cards flicker before my eyes: the ritual Arab girl, shot by a sniper. Arab girl shot by a sniper. Flash blink shot by a sniper.

Although now part of a country dominated by the Nile, Darfur is a Sudanic land: a vast transitional belt that runs across Africa south of the Sahara. Ethnographically Darfur is one of the least charted regions of the Sudan. Here a very utilitarian guide is offered but open to criticism of too great a pre-occupation with the Arab/non Arab divide. More useful is the Occupational or "culture area" approach of Theobald and Horowitz.

Kitchener was tired and I dismounted. He ate grain but refused to drink water. You can lead a chest covered with flies to water but you can't make it drink. The sun was hot. Any distance is distorted and Jebal Neilo had been in sight all morning. We'd halted at Wadi Ario and Kitchener had been afraid to cross the stream. It took myself and three women farming their fields to push him across, coaxing all the time. I lost a sandal in the process.
This book is the result of a love affair. Like many Englishmen I was captivated. Like me Eostik delighted in Sudanese culture. Many of the tribesmen whom I met knew nothing of my own culture. Only the Arabs seemed to stand aloof from this. More difficult to assimilate was the communal nature of everything the Sudanese did: they rarely bought fruit or allowed themselves the luxury of fresh bread.

"Wednesday June 27th: Lions again last night. They came at 12 o'clock. There was the same commotion as the night before. There is simply nothing exciting otherwise. A fallata man came with a parrot for sale." The skull was a beauty with great teeth. Too maddening!

The peace and colour of a perfect African evening: The forest trees allow glimpses of sky blue and gold filtering brokenly through acacias. Arabs are wandering homeward. Two little leopards were brought this morning.
She touches her buttocks hoisted by two giant warriors. Dinkas are one of the most savage and unknown tribes left in Africa. They are stark naked: men, young women and children.

Savage instinct ordering the mind
Because they are so long and thin. One of the Arabs once approached us and remarked "the flies must surely think that it is an elephant." The Dinkas offered to carry them on their heads.

I wish you could see the wildness of it - sense it's loneliness and feel the mosquitoes! You are bitten even in the day time at that part of the year and at night you live in a buzzing inferno.

Buram, where the rank grass grows to your waist and baskanit grass tortures your tender flesh wherever you go! Where hyenas howl and leopards steal your pets. It was strange - incredibly strange - to hear the announcer say: "'I Want My Dance', played by the Piccadilly Hotel dance band."

Affaf was pretty, with regular features and a soft gentle voice. Rhythmic clapping, singing and drumming.

The "cutting of the skirt" is an old custom and originated in the skirt that little girls used to wear. In Darfur, where cattle are herded, the skirt or 'rahad' is a leather belt with many stripes of leather hanging from it to the knee.

When Affaf was fully dressed the incense burner was held under her dress. Twelve year old slave women sat and kept their eyes well glued to their mistresses. They were altogether fascinating - great babies with of course, the addition of a great deal of elemental passion.
She turns away to reveal a veiled neck.
Protruding buttocks are considered sexually attractive by the Sudanese. The posture shows a marked lumbar curve so that invariably the pelvis tilts forward: "You will never get a Husband if you walk like a man." They are taught to cover themselves at an early age, not to expose themselves to the eyes of men.

The royal women were a more visible element - young and marriageable. Muslim visitors professed to be horrified or titillated. The entrails of the wether had been allowed to putrify and mixed with pepper and butter kept inside the drums from the previous year's festival. The princes and princesses were then obliged to eat some of the mixture while behind them stood armed slaves ready to kill any who displayed even the slightest hesitation, since it was believed that anyone contemplating treachery would be unable to eat.
The feast may at one time have included a human victim.

"They don't know Allah, those men! They are notorious thieves". Clitoridectomy is the removal of the prepuce of the clitoris. Excision consists of the removal of the prepuce and glans of the clitoris and often the removal of the whole of it. Infibulation consists of the removal of all the external genitalia, the whole of the clitoris, the entire labia minora and the fleshy parts are then pared down and sewn together leaving an opening the diameter of a match-stick to allow the passage of urine and menstrual flow.
The tip of her clitoris was grasped with a pair of forceps and the whole of the structure removed with a scalpel. A Muslim tradition and a means of ensuring a girl's virginity. Perhaps increased sensitivity of the vaginal walls compensates for the lack of external genitalia; a geographic profile of Darfur describes many of the fundamental traits of its history.

"They appear to be such idyllic people, but the romance fades after a short acquaintance. The women have a queer custom of squatting over a smouldering fire." Billowing discarnate smoke floats through imperfect shade — a snake nippled Cleopatra red flowered in the wind just like the First Woman.

I fed Kitchener his hay and he ate on oblivious save for the annoyance of a horse fly ever elusive as it burrowed through his off-white fur. I too relaxed, happy to watch the blank card filled in by others: A mosquito in the Garden of Eden.
Low Woodyhead, April 1987

brimming, lamplight on,

eastly the most sheltered part of the hill

pattern radials a lizard can drink at without they run

rosettes of diamonds polished as pearl barley picked toward

who find my grass the most-forward

on the seeking eyes

until windspill

through the laterwinter woodpile Gehn

every fresh growth lengthening unstirred upward at the

tell-tale beaded prick, then shine in the strengthening light

hours uncertain dawn’s new rain
harry adventurous squabbling crows,
come on self-conscious rather adolescent
from the empty lower sky and slow
stretches under the care, wind, spite at
watching west, sunset, digesting, Scotland
eagle from watching on, high, silent
wool too wet by the effort to tell-tale on the wind
the best meat neatly dissected out
heap otherwise undisturbed, but for
a track to and a track beyond the ewe
outermost wing feathers, only, print

Kielderhead, January 1987

Tales tell
COLIN SIMMS

The world of word, here in that vast, vast, vast, vast
with a chance of spectacle, here in that vast, vast, vast, vast.

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