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I had a hard time waking up on Sunday, and Marie had to call me and shake me. We didn't eat anything, because we wanted to get to the beach early. I felt completely drained and I had a slight headache. My cigarette tasted bitter. Marie made fun of me because, she said, I had on a "funeral face." She had put on a white linen dress and let her hair down. I told her she was beautiful and she laughed with delight.

On our way downstairs we knocked on Raymond's door. He told us he'd be right down. Once out in the street, because I was so tired and also because we hadn't opened the blinds, the day, already bright with sun, hit me like a slap in the face. Marie was jumping with joy and kept on saying what a beautiful day it was. I felt a little better and I noticed that I was hungry. I told Marie, who pointed to her oilcloth bag where she'd put our bathing suits and a towel. I just had to wait and then we heard Raymond shutting his door. He had on blue trousers and a white short-sleeved shirt. But he'd put on a straw hat, which made Marie laugh, and his forearms were all white under the black hairs. I found it a little

repulsive. He was whistling as he came down the stairs and he seemed very cheerful. He said "Good morning, old man" to me and called Marie "mademoiselle."

The day before, we'd gone to the police station and I'd testified that the girl had cheated on Raymond. He'd gotten off with a warning. They didn't check out my statement. Outside the front door we talked about it with Raymond, and then we decided to take the bus. The beach wasn't very far, but we'd get there sooner that way. Raymond thought his friend would be glad to see us get there early. We were just about to leave when all of a sudden Raymond motioned to me to look across the street. I saw a group of Arabs leaning against the front of the tobacconist's shop. They were staring at us in silence, but in that way of theirs, as if we were nothing but stones or dead trees. Raymond told me that the second one from the left was his man, and he seemed worried. But, he added, it was all settled now. Marie didn't really understand and asked us what was wrong. I told her that they were Arabs who had it in for Raymond. She wanted to get going right away. Raymond drew himself up and laughed, saying we'd better step on it.

We headed toward the bus stop, which wasn't far, and Raymond said that the Arabs weren't following us. I turned around. They were still in the same place and they were looking with the same indifference at the spot where we'd just been standing. We caught the bus. Raymond, who seemed very relieved, kept on cracking

jokes for Marie. I could tell he liked her, but she hardly said anything to him. Every once in a while she'd look at him and laugh.

We got off in the outskirts of Algiers. The beach wasn't far from the bus stop. But we had to cross a small plateau which overlooks the sea and then drops steeply down to the beach. It was covered with yellowish rocks and the whitest asphodels set against the already hard blue of the sky. Marie was having fun scattering the petals, taking big swipes at them with her oilcloth bag. We walked between rows of small houses behind green or white fences, some with their verandas hidden behind the tamarisks, others standing naked among the rocks. Before we reached the edge of the plateau, we could already see the motionless sea and, farther out, a massive, drowsy-looking promontory in the clear water. The faint hum of a motor rose up to us in the still air. And way off, we saw a tiny trawler moving, almost imperceptibly, across the dazzling sea. Marie gathered some rock irises. From the slope leading down to the beach, we could see that there were already some people swimming.

Raymond's friend lived in a little wooden bungalow at the far end of the beach. The back of the house rested up against the rocks, and the pilings that held it up in front went straight down into the water. Raymond introduced us. His friend's name was Masson. He was a big guy, very tall and broad-shouldered, with a plump, sweet little wife with a Parisian accent. Right off he told

us to make ourselves at home and said that his wife had just fried up some fish he'd caught that morning. I told him how nice I thought his house was. He told me that he spent Saturdays and Sundays and all his days off there. "With my wife, of course," he added. Just then his wife was laughing with Marie. For the first time maybe, I really thought I was going to get married.

Masson wanted to go for a swim, but his wife and Raymond didn't want to come. The three of us went down to the beach and Marie jumped right in. Masson and I waited a little. He spoke slowly, and I noticed that he had a habit of finishing everything he said with "and I'd even say," when really it didn't add anything to the meaning of his sentence. Referring to Marie, he said, "She's stunning, and I'd even say charming." After that I didn't pay any more attention to this mannerism of his, because I was absorbed by the feeling that the sun was doing me a lot of good. The sand was starting to get hot underfoot. I held back the urge to get into the water a minute longer, but finally I said to Masson, "Shall we?" I dove in. He waded in slowly and started swimming only when he couldn't touch bottom anymore. He did the breast stroke, and not too well, either, so I left him and joined Marie. The water was cold and I was glad to be swimming. Together again, Marie and I swam out a ways, and we felt a closeness as we moved in unison and were happy.

Out in deeper water we floated on our backs and the sun on my upturned face was drying the last of the

water trickling into my mouth. We saw Masson making his way back to the beach to stretch out in the sun. From far away he looked huge. Marie wanted us to swim together. I got behind her to hold her around the waist. She used her arms to move us forward and I did the kicking. The little splashing sound followed us through the morning air until I got tired. I left Marie and headed back, swimming smoothly and breathing easily. On the beach I stretched out on my stomach alongside Masson and put my face on the sand. I said it was nice and he agreed. Soon afterwards Marie came back. I rolled over to watch her coming. She was glistening all over with salty water and holding her hair back. She lay down right next to me and the combined warmth from her body and from the sun made me doze off.

Marie shook me and told me that Masson had gone back up to the house, that it was time for lunch. I got up right away because I was hungry, but Marie told me I hadn't kissed her since that morning. It was true, and yet I had wanted to. "Come into the water," she said. We ran and threw ourselves into the first little waves. We swam a few strokes and she reached out and held on to me. I felt her legs wrapped around mine and I wanted her.

When we got back, Masson was already calling us. I said I was starving and then out of the blue he announced to his wife that he liked me. The bread was good; I devoured my share of the fish. After that there

was some meat and fried potatoes. We all ate without talking. Masson drank a lot of wine and kept filling my glass. By the time the coffee came, my head felt heavy and I smoked a lot. Masson, Raymond, and I talked about spending August together at the beach, sharing expenses. Suddenly Marie said, "Do you know what time it is? It's only eleven-thirty!" We were all surprised, but Masson said that we'd eaten very early and that it was only natural because lunchtime was whenever you were hungry. For some reason that made Marie laugh. I think she'd had a little too much to drink. Then Masson asked me if I wanted to go for a walk on the beach with him. "My wife always takes a nap after lunch. Me, I don't like naps. I need to walk. I tell her all the time it's better for her health. But it's her business." Marie said she'd stay and help Madame Masson with the dishes. The little Parisienne said that first they'd have to get rid of the men. The three of us went down to the beach.

The sun was shining almost directly overhead onto the sand, and the glare on the water was unbearable. There was no one left on the beach. From inside the bungalows bordering the plateau and jutting out over the water, we could hear the rattling of plates and silverware. It was hard to breathe in the rocky heat rising from the ground. At first Raymond and Masson discussed people and things I didn't know about. I gathered they'd known each other for a long time and had even lived together at one point. We headed down

to the sea and walked along the water's edge. Now and then a little wave would come up higher than the others and wet our canvas shoes. I wasn't thinking about anything, because I was half asleep from the sun beating down on my bare head.

At that point Raymond said something to Masson which I didn't quite catch. But at the same time I noticed, at the far end of the beach and a long way from us, two Arabs in blue overalls coming in our direction. I looked at Raymond and he said, "It's him." We kept walking. Masson asked how they'd managed to follow us all this way. I thought they must have seen us get on the bus with a beach bag, but I didn't say anything.

The Arabs were walking slowly, but they were already much closer. We didn't change our pace, but Raymond said, "If there's any trouble, Masson, you take the other one. I'll take care of my man. Meursault, if another one shows up, he's yours." I said, "Yes," and Masson put his hands in his pockets. The blazing sand looked red to me now. We moved steadily toward the Arabs. The distance between us was getting shorter and shorter. When we were just a few steps away from each other, the Arabs stopped. Masson and I slowed down. Raymond went right up to his man. I couldn't hear what he said to him, but the other guy made a move as though he were going to butt him. Then Raymond struck the first blow and called Masson right away. Masson went for the one that had been pointed out as his and hit him twice, as hard as he could. The Arab fell flat in the water,

facedown, and lay there for several seconds with bubbles bursting on the surface around his head. Meanwhile Raymond had landed one too, and the other Arab's face was bleeding. Raymond turned to me and said, "Watch this. I'm gonna let him have it now." I shouted, "Look out, he's got a knife!" But Raymond's arm had already been cut open and his mouth slashed. Masson lunged forward. But the other Arab had gotten back up and gone around behind the one with the knife. We didn't dare move. They started backing off slowly, without taking their eyes off us, keeping us at bay with the knife. When they thought they were far enough away, they took off running as fast as they could while we stood there motionless in the sun and Raymond clutched at his arm dripping with blood.

Masson immediately said there was a doctor who spent his Sundays up on the plateau. Raymond wanted to go see him right away. But every time he tried to talk the blood bubbled in his mouth. We steadied him and made our way back to the bungalow as quickly as we could. Once there, Raymond said that they were only flesh wounds and that he could make it to the doctor's. He left with Masson and I stayed to explain to the women what had happened. Madame Masson was crying and Marie was very pale. I didn't like having to explain to them, so I just shut up, smoked a cigarette, and looked at the sea.

Raymond came back with Masson around one-thirty. His arm was bandaged up and he had an adhesive

plaster on the corner of his mouth. The doctor had told him that it was nothing, but Raymond looked pretty grim. Masson tried to make him laugh. But he still wouldn't say anything. When he said he was going down to the beach, I asked him where he was going. He said he wanted to get some air. Masson and I said we'd go with him. But that made him angry and he swore at us. Masson said not to argue with him. I followed him anyway.

We walked on the beach for a long time. By now the sun was overpowering. It shattered into little pieces on the sand and water. I had the impression that Raymond knew where he was going, but I was probably wrong. At the far end of the beach we finally came to a little spring running down through the sand behind a large rock. There we found our two Arabs. They were lying down, in their greasy overalls. They seemed perfectly calm and almost content. Our coming changed nothing. The one who had attacked Raymond was looking at him without saying anything. The other one was blowing through a little reed over and over again, watching us out of the corner of his eye. He kept repeating the only three notes he could get out of his instrument.

The whole time there was nothing but the sun and the silence, with the low gurgling from the spring and the three notes. Then Raymond put his hand in his hip pocket, but the others didn't move, they just kept looking at each other. I noticed that the toes on the one

playing the flute were tensed. But without taking his eyes off his adversary, Raymond asked me, "Should I let him have it?" I thought that if I said no he'd get himself all worked up and shoot for sure. All I said was, "He hasn't said anything yet. It'd be pretty lousy to shoot him like that." You could still hear the sound of the water and the flute deep within the silence and the heat. Then Raymond said, "So I'll call him something and when he answers back, I'll let him have it." I answered, "Right. But if he doesn't draw his knife, you can't shoot." Raymond started getting worked up. The other Arab went on playing, and both of them were watching every move Raymond made. "No," I said to Raymond, "take him on man to man and give me your gun. If the other one moves in, or if he draws his knife, I'll let him have it."

The sun glinted off Raymond's gun as he handed it to me. But we just stood there motionless, as if everything had closed in around us. We stared at each other without blinking, and everything came to a stop there between the sea, the sand, and the sun, and the double silence of the flute and the water. It was then that I realized that you could either shoot or not shoot. But all of a sudden, the Arabs, backing away, slipped behind the rock. So Raymond and I turned and headed back the way we'd come. He seemed better and talked about the bus back.

I went with him as far as the bungalow, and as he climbed the wooden steps, I just stood there at the

bottom, my head ringing from the sun, unable to face the effort it would take to climb the wooden staircase and face the women again. But the heat was so intense that it was just as bad standing still in the blinding stream falling from the sky. To stay or to go, it amounted to the same thing. A minute later I turned back toward the beach and started walking.

There was the same dazzling red glare. The sea gasped for air with each shallow, stifled little wave that broke on the sand. I was walking slowly toward the rocks and I could feel my forehead swelling under the sun. All that heat was pressing down on me and making it hard for me to go on. And every time I felt a blast of its hot breath strike my face, I gritted my teeth, clenched my fists in my trouser pockets, and strained every nerve in order to overcome the sun and the thick drunkenness it was spilling over me. With every blade of light that flashed off the sand, from a bleached shell or a piece of broken glass, my jaws tightened. I walked for a long time.

From a distance I could see the small, dark mass of rock surrounded by a blinding halo of light and sea spray. I was thinking of the cool spring behind the rock. I wanted to hear the murmur of its water again, to escape the sun and the strain and the women's tears, and to find shade and rest again at last. But as I got closer, I saw that Raymond's man had come back.

He was alone. He was lying on his back, with his hands behind his head, his forehead in the shade of the

rock, the rest of his body in the sun. His blue overalls seemed to be steaming in the heat. I was a little surprised. As far as I was concerned, the whole thing was over, and I'd gone there without even thinking about it.

As soon as he saw me, he sat up a little and put his hand in his pocket. Naturally, I gripped Raymond's gun inside my jacket. Then he lay back again, but without taking his hand out of his pocket. I was pretty far away from him, about ten meters or so. I could tell he was glancing at me now and then through half-closed eyes. But most of the time, he was just a form shimmering before my eyes in the fiery air. The sound of the waves was even lazier, more drawn out than at noon. It was the same sun, the same light still shining on the same sand as before. For two hours the day had stood still; for two hours it had been anchored in a sea of molten lead. On the horizon, a tiny steamer went by, and I made out the black dot from the corner of my eye because I hadn't stopped watching the Arab.

It occurred to me that all I had to do was turn around and that would be the end of it. But the whole beach, throbbing in the sun, was pressing on my back. I took a few steps toward the spring. The Arab didn't move. Besides, he was still pretty far away. Maybe it was the shadows on his face, but it looked like he was laughing. I waited. The sun was starting to burn my cheeks, and I could feel drops of sweat gathering in my eyebrows. The sun was the same as it had been the day I'd buried Maman, and like then, my forehead

especially was hurting me, all the veins in it throbbing under the skin. It was this burning, which I couldn't stand anymore, that made me move forward. I knew that it was stupid, that I wouldn't get the sun off me by stepping forward. But I took a step, one step, forward. And this time, without getting up, the Arab drew his knife and held it up to me in the sun. The light shot off the steel and it was like a long flashing blade cutting at my forehead. At the same instant the sweat in my eyebrows dripped down over my eyelids all at once and covered them with a warm, thick film. My eyes were blinded behind the curtain of tears and salt. All I could feel were the cymbals of sunlight crashing on my forehead and, indistinctly, the dazzling spear flying up from the knife in front of me. The scorching blade slashed at my eyelashes and stabbed at my stinging eyes. That's when everything began to reel. The sea carried up a thick, fiery breath. It seemed to me as if the sky split open from one end to the other to rain down fire. My whole being tensed and I squeezed my hand around the revolver. The trigger gave; I felt the smooth underside of the butt; and there, in that noise, sharp and deafening at the same time, is where it all started. I shook off the sweat and sun. I knew that I had shattered the harmony of the day, the exceptional silence of a beach where I'd been happy. Then I fired four more times at the motionless body where the bullets lodged without leaving a trace. And it was like knocking four quick times on the door of unhappiness.