DELPHI CLASSICS

Albert Camus

Collected Works

Series Fifteen

The Collected Works of

ALBERT CAMUS

(1913-1960)

Contents

Version 1

The Collected Works of

ALBERT CAMUS

With introductory material by Gill Rossini, MA

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Collected Works of Albert Camus

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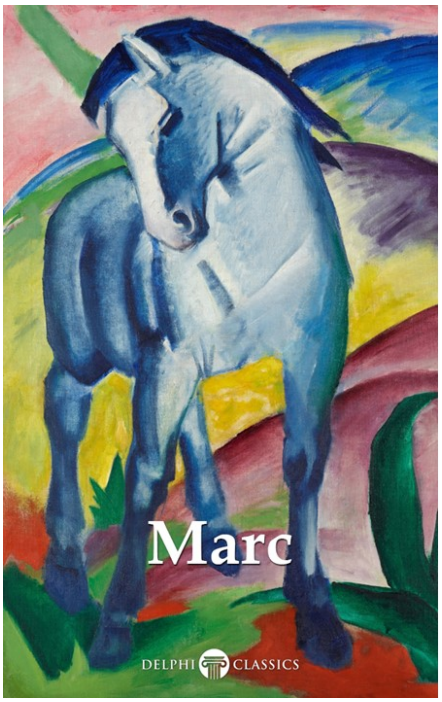
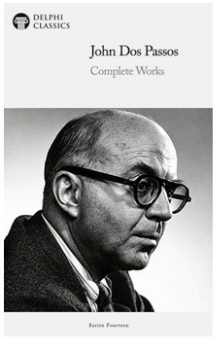
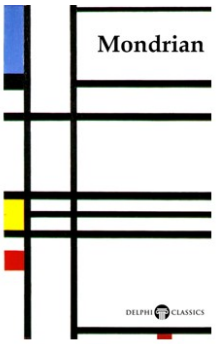
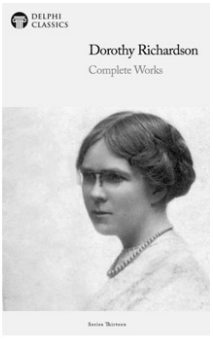
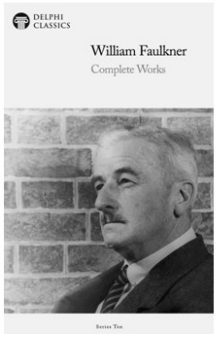
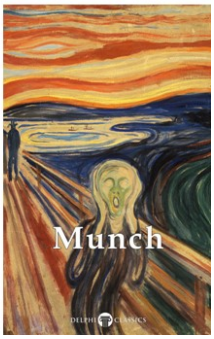






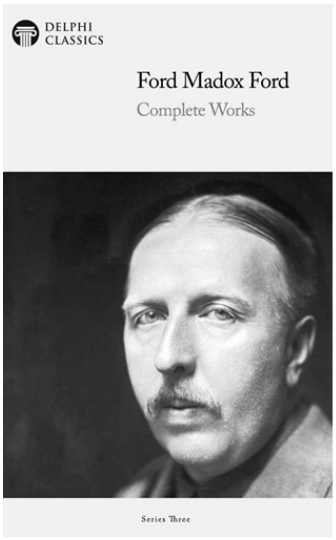


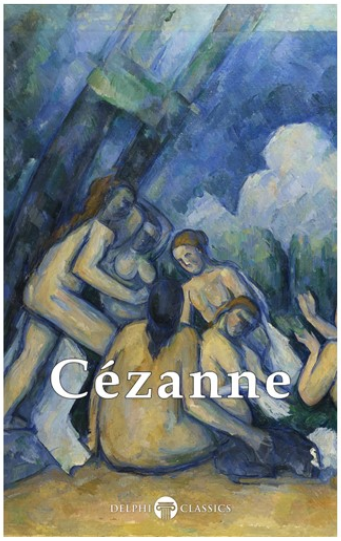




[Modernists at Delphi]

Explore Modernism





The Novels

Dréan, a small coastal town in Algeria, c. 1910. Albert Camus was born in Mondovi (present-day Dréan) in 1913. He was born in a working-class neighbourhood. His mother, Catherine Hélène Camus (née Sintès), was French with Balearic Spanish ancestry. She was deaf and illiterate. He never knew his father, Lucien Camus, a poor French agricultural worker killed in the trenches of World War I.

Dréan today

The Stranger (1942)

Original French Title: 'L'Étranger'

Translated by Stuart Gilbert, 1946

L'Étranger was the first of Camus' novels published in his lifetime. He finished the original manuscript in 1941 and then was assisted in refining it by several French authors, including Andre Malraux (author and government minister), Jean Paulhan (writer, critic and publisher) and Raymond Queneau (novelist and poet); for example, Malraux suggested a revision of some key scenes, including the murder, which Camus agreed to. Gallimard published it in the original French on 19 May 1942 during the Nazi occupation of France, where the necessarily limited print run reached the book shops in June. It had not been subjected to any censorship by the Propaganda-Staffel ('propaganda squadron', responsible for the French press and propaganda during the occupation). Perhaps the offer of help at the editing stage from Gerhard Heller, a German editor, translator and lieutenant in the Wehrmacht working for the Censorship Bureau, assisted in its smooth passage to publication.

It was published in English from 1946, starting in the United Kingdom, with a revised title: *The Outsider*. This was to avoid confusion with another book also called *The Stranger*, but written by Maria Kuncewiczowa. Camus' book was, however, published under its original name in America.

There have been four published translations into English for different editions; apart from this 1946 version, others were published in 1982 (tr. Joseph Laredo); 1989 (tr. Matthew Ward); and 2012 (tr. Sandra Smith). Translating any book from its original language to another inevitably leads to discussion about accuracy and appropriateness of the chosen 'second language' words and phrases. For example, *Aujourd'hui, Maman est morte* is the original opening sentence of the novel. English translations have rendered the first sentence as 'Mother died today', 'Maman died today', or similar. In 2012, Ryan Bloom argued that it should be translated as 'Today, Maman died'. He believes this better expresses the character of Meursault, who has a curious detached capacity for living 'in the now'.

Camus was suffering from tuberculosis at the time of publication and was not able to fulfil his traditional role as a French writer and personally hand newly published copies of his book to journalists, for review. Thanks to the circumstances around its publication — short print run, the occupation etc. — the book went unnoticed by many. It was the publication of Jean Paul Sartre's commentary, *Explication de L'Étranger* (*Analysis of The Stranger;* published by Gallimard in *Situations I* in 1947), that brought the novella to the attention of those opposed to the Nazi regime and raised its profile beyond the rarefied circles of literary fiction. The flattering critique was perhaps no surprise, as the two men were friends at that time and also shared Gallimard as a publisher, as well as a mutual interest in theatre. In this essay, Sartre compared Camus to Hemingway and Kafka, stating:

> 'There is not a single unnecessary detail… There is no single one which does not help to lead the hero to crime and capital punishment. *The Stranger* is a classical work, an orderly work, composed about the absurd and against the absurd.'

In the comparison with Hemingway, he notes a strong similarity in the terseness of style and use of short sentences. Sartre also highlights Camus' attempt to highlight the feeling of the absurd; here, he is making reference to absurdism, a philosophical outlook that explores the contradiction between the human desire for meaning and the indifferent, chaotic nature of the universe, perceiving life as inherently meaningless and that it is ultimately impossible to find any meaning in it. He remarks as well on the effective use of existentialism at the end of the story. Existentialism is another philosophical position that actually seeks to find meaning in life in a meaningless world and stresses the individual experience and freedom of choice.

Sartre also praised the construction of the protagonist's character — a 'lucid, indifferent, taciturn man' — and descriptions of various events, such as the funeral.

The novella has twice been adapted for film: *Lo Straniero* (1967), an Italian language film directed by Luschino Visconti and starring Marcello Mastroianni in the title role; and *Yazgı* (*Fate*, 2001), a Turkish language adaptation directed Zeki Demerkubuz. Of the Italian movie, the reviewer in the *Daily Express* wrote: 'Marcello Mastroianni is a convincing anti-hero, but a man, who doesn't react with any particular interest to either love or death is a rather a dull fellow to watch. The moral is that all philosophical novels don't make intellectually stimulating films'. (27th December 1968)

L'Étranger has been much more widely praised than this over the years. *Le Monde* placed it in first position in their list of the top one hundred books of the twentieth century and an impressive list of eminent critics and commentators have published their analyses of the novella. Responses remained mixed; in 1960, Louis Hudon dismissed the notion that the story contained any existentialism and in 1970 Louis Bersani felt the story was 'mediocre' in its attempt to be a profound novel. Other themes in the story, such as indifference, detachment and alienation, have all received intensive scrutiny. Professor Carl Viggiani enthused in 1956:

> 'On the surface, *L'Étranger* gives the appearance of being an extremely simple though carefully planned and written book. In reality, it is a dense and rich creation, full of undiscovered meanings and formal qualities.'

Viggiani went on to say that to do the story justice one would have to write another whole book to explore its complexities. The novella was also retold from the perspective of the unnamed Arab man's brother in Kamel Daoud's 2013 novel, *The Meursault Investigation*, first published in Algeria and then France where it was well received.

Camus' story concerns Meursault, a settler in French Algeria, which would gain independence twenty years later in 1962. The story is divided into two parts, presenting Meursault's first-person narrative before and after a significant and life-changing event. The narrative opens with a flat, unvarnished statement from Meursault — his mother has just died. He must now travel from where he lives and works to The Home for Aged Persons in Marengo, where she had been cared for, to meet the warden and sort out her affairs. He feels rather self conscious when he arrives and guilty that he didn't do enough for his mother, having barely seen her for a year. However, the warden assures him she was happy and well cared for and Meursault should feel no guilt for placing her there:

> '"She had good friends here, you know, old folks like herself and one gets on better with people of one's own generation. You're much too young; you couldn't have been much of a companion to her."'

It would seem that she even had a romantic interest in the form of another resident, Mr. Perez and they were so close that it was widely quipped in the home that they were an engaged couple. Allowing the warden to make the arrangements does lead to some ironic moments, however; he has arranged for her to be buried with a full church funeral, which he says had been her wish, even though Meursault knew she had 'never given a thought to religion in her life'.

Meursault finds himself talked into holding an overnight vigil beside his mother's coffin, as a prelude to the funeral the following morning. He is joined variously by a nurse, the doorkeeper, who is as old as the residents and some resident friends of his mother. He thinks his vigil companions rather odd, making funny noises and emitting the occasional sob, but he is happy to drink the coffee the keeper hands around and indeed, at first, Meursault believes they were not at all perturbed that their friend had died.

The morning of the funeral, Meursault freshens himself and prepares for the service. Only the warden, a nurse, himself and one other person will be there — his mother's special man friend, Perez. They accompany the horse-drawn hearse on foot, but Perez, due to his limp, lags behind and they all suffer in the searing heat of the morning. And so the funeral unfolds before them and as is often the case with such life events, Meursault can remember everything in the minutest detail, whether his conscious mind wants to or not.

After the funeral, Meursault strives to have a 'normal' weekend. We see him dating a young woman, Marie, and returning to his rather eccentrically arranged flat where they spend the night together. On the Sunday, he settles himself on his balcony and observes people going about their leisure activities, dressed in their best clothes. It is such a mundane day that he realises that his mother's death has changed nothing at all in his life.

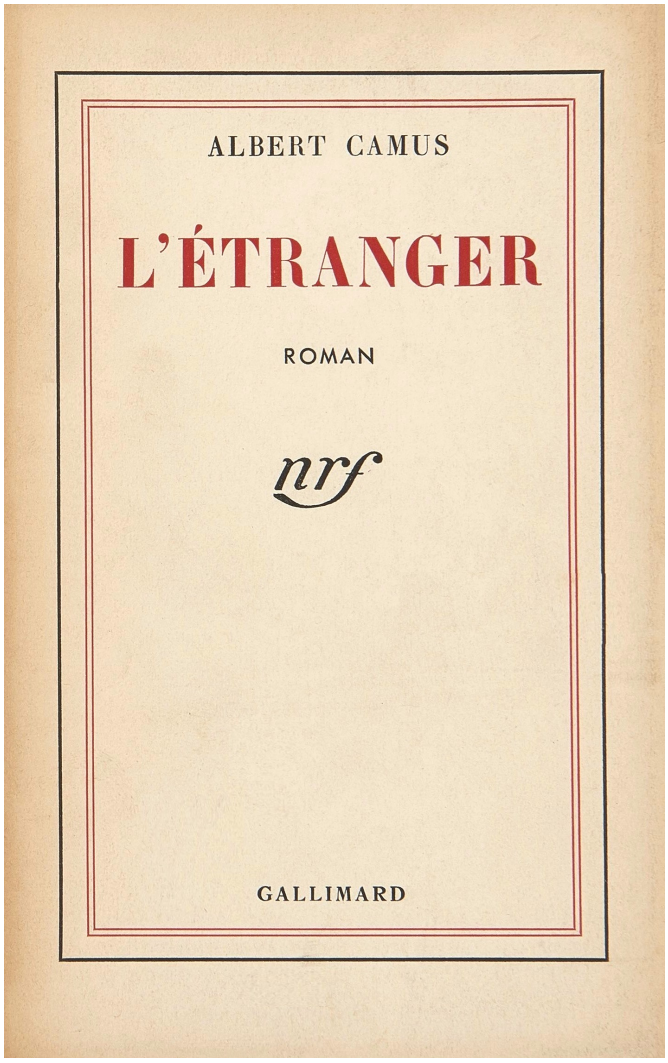
The days go by unremarkably. Meursault builds on his affair with his new girlfriend and spends some time with a neighbour, Raymond Sintes, a man of dubious reputation (very likely a pimp), who has trouble enough in his own romantic life to the point where a violent argument results in a visit from the police. Meursault gets embroiled in the situation when Raymond hatches a plan to get his own back on his erstwhile girl with an unpleasant and humiliating plan, as he thinks she has cheated on him.

Marie and Meursault agree to go to a weekend house party by the beach with Raymond and the excursion starts wonderfully, with sea bathing and sun bathing in equal measure. However, some Arab men, one of whom is the brother of a former girlfriend of Raymond, has followed them to the beauty spot. They mean to do Raymond harm, that much is clear. How will the house party guests deal with this dangerous situation? After all, the girlfriend's brother had threatened to kill Raymond…

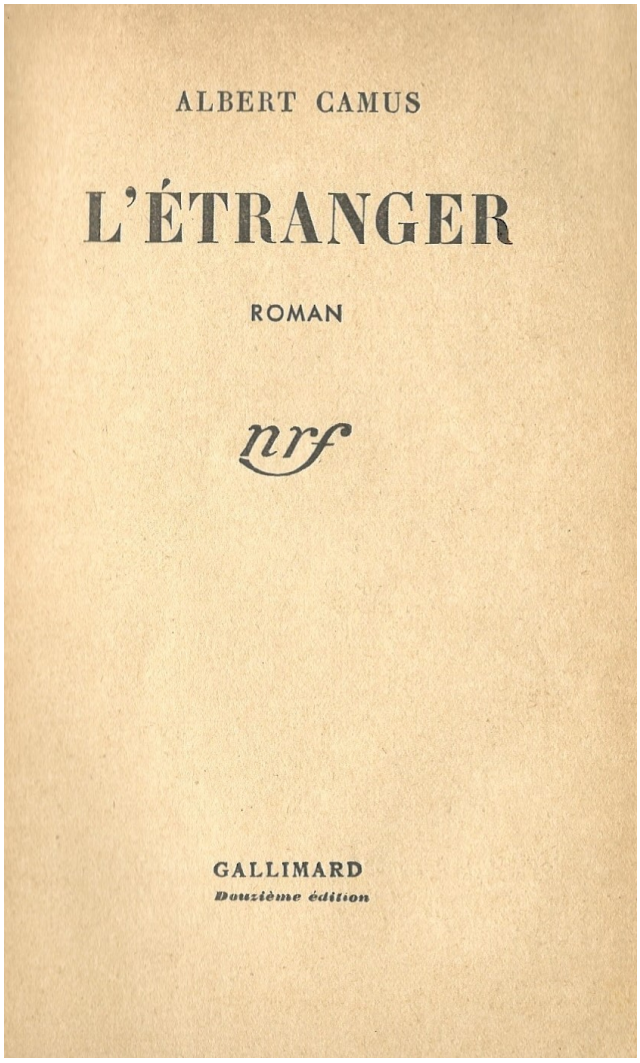
This is an easy to read story, but that is a deception; it is also full of thought provoking curiosities. The greatest of these is the detachment with which Meursault witnesses the events around him — including the death and funeral of his mother and the mistreatment of Raymond's girlfriend; there is another violent event in the story and even that does little to disrupt the protagonist's impassivity. His lack of emotion enables him to look at the world as if through a microscope, at the minutest detail, such as the vivid description of the funeral, which is full of observations that bring the event vibrantly to life; for example, through Meursault we witness the contrast between:

> ‘the blue and white of the sky and the monotony of the colours around me — the sticky black of the tar, the dull black of all the clothes and the shiny black of the hearse. All of it — the sun, the smell of leather and horse dung from the hearse, the smell of varnish and incense…making it hard for me to see or think straight.’

One can read this story simply as that — a narrative with a curiosity for a protagonist — or we can analyse the absurdism in it. In that way this finely crafted tale, which is not without its humour, should please all readers.



The first edition



The first edition's title page

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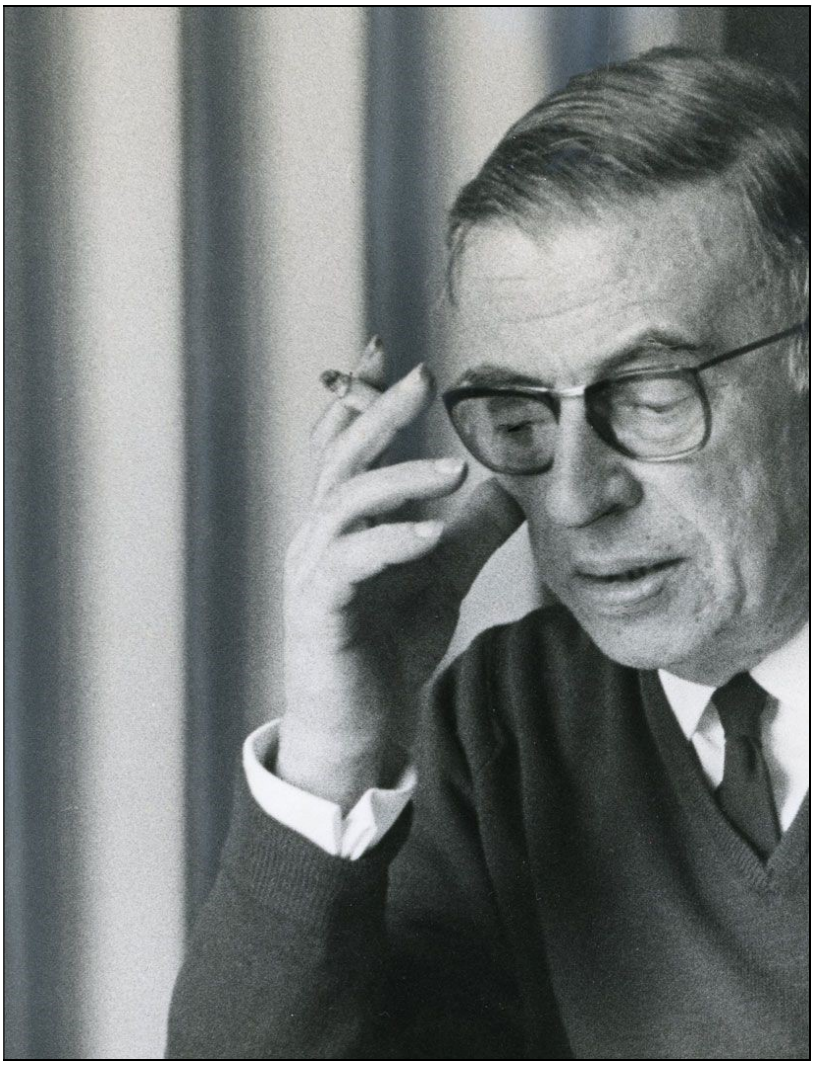
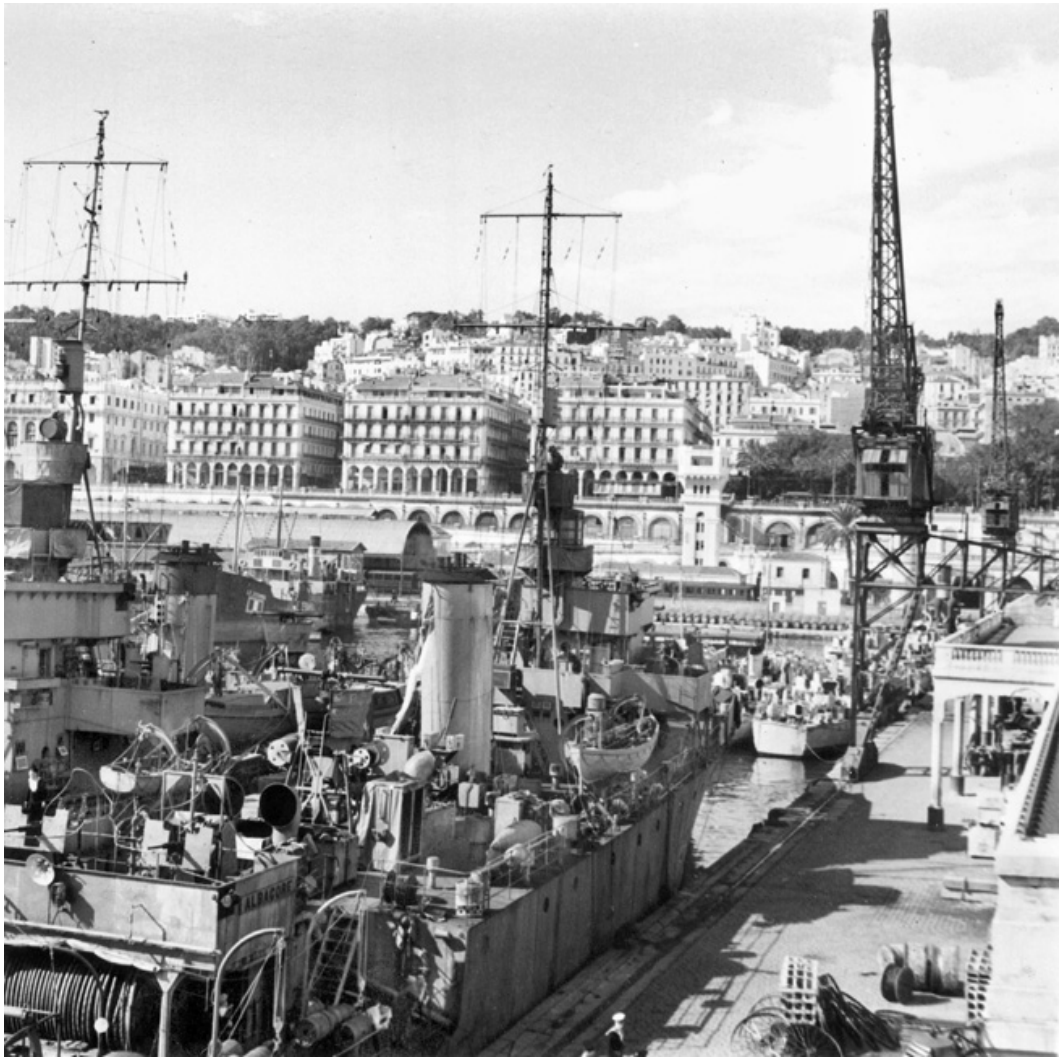


Jean-Paul Sartre, c. 1970



Algiers, 1942 — the year the novel was first published

Camus, close to the time of publication

PART ONE

I

MOTHER DIED TODAY. Or, maybe, yesterday; I can't be sure. The telegram from the Home says: *YOUR MOTHER PASSED AWAY. FUNERAL TOMORROW. DEEP SYMPATHY*. Which leaves the matter doubtful; it could have been yesterday.

The Home for Aged Persons is at Marengo, some fifty miles from Algiers. With the two o'clock bus I should get there well before nightfall. Then I can spend the night there, keeping the usual vigil beside the body, and be back here by tomorrow evening. I have fixed up with my employer for two days' leave; obviously, under the circumstances, he couldn't refuse. Still, I had an idea he looked annoyed, and I said, without thinking: "Sorry, sir, but it's not my fault, you know."

Afterwards it struck me I needn't have said that. I had no reason to excuse myself; it was up to him to express his sympathy and so forth. Probably he will do so the day after tomorrow, when he sees me in black. For the present, it's almost as if Mother weren't really dead. The funeral will bring it home to me, put an official seal on it, so to speak…

I took the two-o'clock bus. It was a blazing hot afternoon. I'd lunched, as usual, at Céleste's restaurant. Everyone was most kind, and Céleste said to me, "There's no one like a mother." When I left they came with me to the door. It was something of a rush, getting away, as at the last moment I had to call in at Emmanuel's place to borrow his black tie and mourning band. He lost his uncle a few months ago.

I had to run to catch the bus. I suppose it was my hurrying like that, what with the glare off the road and from the sky, the reek of gasoline, and the jolts, that made me feel so drowsy. Anyhow, I slept most of the way. When I woke I was leaning against a soldier; he grinned and asked me if I'd come from a long way off, and I just nodded, to cut things short. I wasn't in a mood for talking.

The Home is a little over a mile from the village. I went there on foot. I asked to be allowed to see Mother at once, but the doorkeeper told me I must see the warden first. He wasn't free, and I had to wait a bit. The doorkeeper chatted with me while I waited; then he led me to the office. The warden was a very small man, with gray hair, and a Legion of Honor rosette in his buttonhole. He gave me a long look with his watery blue eyes. Then we shook hands, and he held mine so long that I began to feel embarrassed. After that he consulted a register on his table, and said:

"Madame Meursault entered the Home three years ago. She had no private means and depended entirely on you."

I had a feeling he was blaming me for something, and started to explain. But he cut me short.

"There's no need to excuse yourself, my boy. I've looked up the record and obviously you weren't in a position to see that she was properly cared for. She needed someone to be with her all the time, and young men in jobs like yours don't get too much pay. In any case, she was much happier in the Home."

I said, "Yes, sir; I'm sure of that."

Then he added: "She had good friends here, you know, old folks like herself, and one gets on better with people of one's own generation. You're much too young; you couldn't have been much of a companion to her."

That was so. When we lived together, Mother was always watching me, but we hardly ever talked. During her first few weeks at the Home she used to cry a good deal. But that was only because she hadn't settled down. After a month or two she'd

have cried if she'd been told to leave the Home. Because this, too, would have been a wrench. That was why, during the last year, I seldom went to see her. Also, it would have meant losing my Sunday — not to mention the trouble of going to the bus, getting my ticket, and spending two hours on the journey each way.

The warden went on talking, but I didn't pay much attention. Finally he said:

"Now, I suppose you'd like to see your mother?"

I rose without replying, and he led the way to the door. As we were going down the stairs he explained:

"I've had the body moved to our little mortuary — so as not to upset the other old people, you understand. Every time there's a death here, they're in a nervous state for two or three days. Which means, of course, extra work and worry for our staff."

We crossed a courtyard where there were a number of old men, talking amongst themselves in little groups. They fell silent as we came up with them. Then, behind our backs, the chattering began again. Their voices reminded me of parakeets in a cage, only the sound wasn't quite so shrill. The warden stopped outside the entrance of a small, low building.

"So here I leave you, Monsieur Meursault. If you want me for anything, you'll find me in my office. We propose to have the funeral tomorrow morning. That will enable you to spend the night beside your mother's coffin, as no doubt you would wish to do. Just one more thing; I gathered from your mother's friends that she wished to be buried with the rites of the Church. I've made arrangements for this; but I thought I should let you know."

I thanked him. So far as I knew, my mother, though not a professed atheist, had never given a thought to religion in her life.

I entered the mortuary. It was a bright, spotlessly clean room, with whitewashed walls and a big skylight. The furniture consisted of some chairs and trestles. Two of the latter stood open in the center of the room and the coffin rested on them. The lid was in place, but the screws had been given only a few turns and their nickeled heads stuck out above the wood, which was stained dark walnut. An Arab woman — a nurse, I supposed — was sitting beside the bier; she was wearing a blue smock and had a rather gaudy scarf wound round her hair.

Just then the keeper came up behind me. He'd evidently been running, as he was a little out of breath.

"We put the lid on, but I was told to unscrew it when you came, so that you could see her."

While he was going up to the coffin I told him not to trouble.

"Eh? What's that?" he exclaimed. "You don't want me to…?"

"No," I said.

He put back the screwdriver in his pocket and stared at me. I realized then that I shouldn't have said, "No," and it made me rather embarrassed. After eying me for some moments he asked:

"Why not?" But he didn't sound reproachful; he simply wanted to know.

"Well, really I couldn't say," I answered.

He began twiddling his white mustache; then, without looking at me, said gently:

"I understand."

He was a pleasant-looking man, with blue eyes and ruddy cheeks. He drew up a chair for me near the coffin, and seated himself just behind. The nurse got up and moved toward the door. As she was going by, the keeper whispered in my ear:

"It's a tumor she has, poor thing."

I looked at her more carefully and I noticed that she had a bandage round her head, just below her eyes. It lay quite flat across the bridge of her nose, and one saw hardly anything of her face except that strip of whiteness.

As soon as she had gone, the keeper rose.

"Now I'll leave you to yourself."

I don't know whether I made some gesture, but instead of going he halted behind my chair. The sensation of someone posted at my back made me uncomfortable. The sun was getting low and the whole room was flooded with a pleasant, mellow light. Two hornets were buzzing overhead, against the skylight. I was so sleepy I could hardly keep my eyes open. Without looking round, I asked the keeper how long he'd been at the Home. "Five years." The answer came so pat that one could have thought he'd been expecting my question.

That started him off, and he became quite chatty. If anyone had told him ten years ago that he'd end his days as doorkeeper at a home at Marengo, he'd never have believed it. He was sixty-four, he said, and hailed from Paris.

When he said that, I broke in. "Ah, you don't come from here?"

I remembered then that, before taking me to the warden, he'd told me something about Mother. He had said she'd have to be buried mighty quickly because heat in these parts, especially down in the plain. "At Paris they keep the body for three days, sometimes four." After that he had mentioned that he'd spent the best part of his life in Paris, and could never manage to forget it. "Here," he had said, "things have to go with a rush, like. You've hardly time to get used to the idea that someone's dead, before you're hauled off to the funeral." "That's enough," his wife had put in. "You didn't ought to say such things to the poor young gentleman." The old fellow had blushed and begun to apologize. I told him it was quite all right. As a matter of fact, I found it rather interesting, what he'd been telling me; I hadn't thought of that before.

Now he went on to say that he'd entered the Home as an ordinary inmate. But he was still quite hale and hearty, and when the keeper's job fell vacant, he offered to take it on.

I pointed out that, even so, he was really an inmate like the others, but he wouldn't hear of it. He was "an official, like." I'd been struck before by his habit of saying "they" or, less often, "them old folks," when referring to inmates no older than himself. Still, I could see his point of view. As doorkeeper he had a certain standing, and some authority over the rest of them.

Just then the nurse returned. Night had fallen very quickly; all of a sudden, it seemed, the sky went black above the skylight. The keeper switched on the lamps, and I was almost blinded by the blaze of light.

He suggested I should go to the refectory for dinner, but I wasn't hungry. Then he proposed bringing me a mug of *café au lait*. As I am very partial to *café au lait* I said, "Thanks," and a few minutes later he came back with a tray. I drank the coffee, and then I wanted a cigarette. But I wasn't sure if I should smoke, under the circumstances — in Mother's presence. I thought it over; really, it didn't seem to matter, so I offered the keeper a cigarette, and we both smoked.

After a while he started talking again. "You know, your mother's friends will be coming soon, to keep vigil with you beside the body. We always have a 'vigil' here, when anyone dies. I'd better go and get some chairs and a pot of black coffee."

The glare off the white walls was making my eyes smart, and I asked him if he couldn't turn off one of the lamps. "Nothing doing," he said. They'd arranged the lights like that; either one had them all on or none at all. After that I didn't pay much more attention to him. He went out, brought some chairs, and set them out round the

coffin. On one he placed a coffeepot and ten or a dozen cups. Then he sat down facing me, on the far side of Mother. The nurse was at the other end of the room, with her back to me. I couldn't see what she was doing, but by the way her arms moved I guessed that she was knitting. I was feeling very comfortable; the coffee had warmed me up, and through the open door came scents of flowers and breaths of cool night air. I think I dozed off for a while.

I was wakened by an odd rustling in my ears. After having had my eyes closed, I had a feeling that the light had grown even stronger than before. There wasn't a trace of shadow anywhere, and every object, each curve or angle, seemed to score its outline on one's eyes. The old people, Mother's friends, were coming in. I counted ten in all, gliding almost soundlessly through the bleak white glare. None of the chairs creaked when they sat down. Never in my life had I seen anyone so clearly as I saw these people; not a detail of their clothes or features escaped me. And yet I couldn't hear them, and it was hard to believe they really existed.

Nearly all the women wore aprons, and the strings drawn tight round their waists made their big stomachs bulge still more. I'd never yet noticed what big paunches old women usually have. Most of the men, however, were as thin as rakes, and they all carried sticks. What struck me most about their faces was that one couldn't see their eyes, only a dull glow in a sort of nest of wrinkles.

On sitting down, they looked at me, and wagged their heads awkwardly, their lips sucked in between their toothless gums. I couldn't decide if they were greeting me and trying to say something, or if it was due to some infirmity of age. I inclined to think that they were greeting me, after their fashion, but it had a queer effect, seeing all those old fellows grouped round the keeper, solemnly eying me and dandling their heads from side to side. For a moment I had an absurd impression that they had come to sit in judgment on me.

A few minutes later one of the women started weeping. She was in the second row and I couldn't see her face because of another woman in front. At regular intervals she emitted a little choking sob; one had a feeling she would never stop. The others didn't seem to notice. They sat in silence, slumped in their chairs, staring at the coffin or at their walking sticks or any object just in front of them, and never took their eyes off it. And still the woman sobbed. I was rather surprised, as I didn't know who she was. I wanted her to stop crying, but dared not speak to her. After a while the keeper bent toward her and whispered in her ear; but she merely shook her head, mumbled something I couldn't catch, and went on sobbing as steadily as before.

The keeper got up and moved his chair beside mine. At first he kept silent; then, without looking at me, he explained.

"She was devoted to your mother. She says your mother was her only friend in the world, and now she's all alone."

I had nothing to say, and the silence lasted quite a while. Presently the woman's sighs and sobs became less frequent, and, after blowing her nose and snuffling for some minutes, she, too, fell silent.

I'd ceased feeling sleepy, but I was very tired and my legs were aching badly. And now I realized that the silence of these people was telling on my nerves. The only sound was a rather queer one; it came only now and then, and at first I was puzzled by it. However, after listening attentively, I guessed what it was; the old men were sucking at the insides of their cheeks, and this caused the odd, wheezing noises that had mystified me. They were so much absorbed in their thoughts that they didn't know what they were up to. I even had an impression that the dead body in their midst meant nothing at all to them. But now I suspect that I was mistaken about this.

We all drank the coffee, which the keeper handed round. After that, I can't remember much; somehow the night went by. I can recall only one moment; I had opened my eyes and I saw the old men sleeping hunched up on their chairs, with one exception. Resting his chin on his hands clasped round his stick, he was staring hard at me, as if he had been waiting for me to wake. Then I fell asleep again. I woke up after a bit, because the ache in my legs had developed into a sort of cramp.

There was a glimmer of dawn above the skylight. A minute or two later one of the old men woke up and coughed repeatedly. He spat into a big check handkerchief, and each time he spat it sounded as if he were retching. This woke the others, and the keeper told them it was time to make a move. They all got up at once. Their faces were ashen gray after the long, uneasy vigil. To my surprise each of them shook hands with me, as though this night together, in which we hadn't exchanged a word, had created a kind of intimacy between us.

I was quite done in. The keeper took me to his room, and I tidied myself up a bit. He gave me some more "white" coffee, and it seemed to do me good. When I went out, the sun was up and the sky mottled red above the hills between Marengo and the sea. A morning breeze was blowing and it had a pleasant salty tang. There was the promise of a very fine day. I hadn't been in the country for ages, and I caught myself thinking what an agreeable walk I could have had, if it hadn't been for Mother.

As it was, I waited in the courtyard, under a plane tree. I sniffed the smells of the cool earth and found I wasn't sleepy any more. Then I thought of the other fellows in the office. At this hour they'd be getting up, preparing to go to work; for me this was always the worst hour of the day. I went on thinking, like this, for ten minutes or so; then the sound of a bell inside the building attracted my attention. I could see movements behind the windows; then all was calm again. The sun had risen a little higher and was beginning to warm my feet. The keeper came across the yard and said the warden wished to see me. I went to his office and he got me to sign some document. I noticed that he was in black, with pin-stripe trousers. He picked up the telephone receiver and looked at me.

"The undertaker's men arrived some moments ago, and they will be going to the mortuary to screw down the coffin. Shall I tell them to wait, for you to have a last glimpse of your mother?"

"No," I said.

He spoke into the receiver, lowering his voice. "That's all right, Figeac. Tell the men to go there now."

He then informed me that he was going to attend the funeral, and I thanked him. Sitting down behind his desk, he crossed his short legs and leaned back. Besides the nurse on duty, he told me, he and I would be the only mourners at the funeral. It was a rule of the Home that inmates shouldn't attend funerals, though there was no objection to letting some of them sit up beside the coffin, the night before.

"It's for their own sakes," he explained, "to spare their feelings. But in this particular instance I've given permission to an old friend of your mother to come with us. His name is Thomas Pérez." The warden smiled. "It's a rather touching little story in its way. He and your mother had become almost inseparable. The other old people used to tease Pérez about having a fiancée. 'When are you going to marry her?' they'd ask. He'd turn it with a laugh. It was a standing joke, in fact. So, as you can guess, he feels very badly about your mother's death. I thought I couldn't decently refuse him permission to attend the funeral. But, on our medical officer's advice, I forbade him to sit up beside the body last night."

For some time we sat there without speaking. Then the warden got up and went to the window. Presently he said:

"Ah, there's the padre from Marengo. He's a bit ahead of time."

He warned me that it would take us a good three quarters of an hour, walking to the church, which was in the village. Then we went downstairs.

The priest was waiting just outside the mortuary door. With him were two acolytes, one of whom had a censer. The priest was stooping over him, adjusting the length of the silver chain on which it hung. When he saw us he straightened up and said a few words to me, addressing me as, "My son." Then he led the way into the mortuary.

I noticed at once that four men in black were standing behind the coffin and the screws in the lid had now been driven home. At the same moment I heard the warden remark that the hearse had arrived, and the priest starting his prayers. Then everybody made a move. Holding a strip of black cloth, the four men approached the coffin, while the priest, the boys, and myself filed out. A lady I hadn't seen before was standing by the door. "This is Monsieur Meursault," the warden said to her. I didn't catch her name, but I gathered she was a nursing sister attached to the Home. When I was introduced, she bowed, without the trace of a smile on her long, gaunt face. We stood aside from the doorway to let the coffin by; then, following the bearers down a corridor, we came to the front entrance, where a hearse was waiting. Oblong, glossy, varnished black all over, it vaguely reminded me of the pen trays in the office.

Beside the hearse stood a quaintly dressed little man, whose duty it was, I understood, to supervise the funeral, as a sort of master of ceremonies. Near him, looking constrained, almost bashful, was old M. Pérez, my mother's special friend. He wore a soft felt hat with a pudding-basin crown and a very wide brim — he whisked it off the moment the coffin emerged from the doorway — trousers that concentrated on his shoes, a black tie much too small for his high white double collar. Under a bulbous, pimply nose, his lips were trembling. But what caught my attention most was his ears; pendulous, scarlet ears that showed up like blobs of sealing wax on the pallor of his cheeks and were framed in wisps of silky white hair.

The undertaker's factotum shepherded us to our places, with the priest in front of the hearse, and the four men in black on each side of it. The warden and myself came next, and, bringing up the rear, old Pérez and the nurse.

The sky was already a blaze of light, and the air stoking up rapidly. I felt the first waves of heat lapping my back, and my dark suit made things worse. I couldn't imagine why we waited so long for getting under way. Old Pérez, who had put on his hat, took it off again. I had turned slightly in his direction and was looking at him when the warden started telling me more about him. I remember his saying that old Pérez and my mother used often to have a longish stroll together in the cool of the evening; sometimes they went as far as the village, accompanied by a nurse, of course.

I looked at the countryside, at the long lines of cypresses sloping up toward the skyline and the hills, the hot red soil dappled with vivid green, and here and there a lonely house sharply outlined against the light — and I could understand Mother's feelings. Evenings in these parts must be a sort of mournful solace. Now, in the full glare of the morning sun, with everything shimmering in the heat haze, there was something inhuman, discouraging, about this landscape.

At last we made a move. Only then I noticed that Pérez had a slight limp. The old chap steadily lost ground as the hearse gained speed. One of the men beside it, too, fell back and drew level with me. I was surprised to see how quickly the sun was climbing up the sky, and just then it struck me that for quite a while the air had been

throbbing with the hum of insects and the rustle of grass warming up. Sweat was running down my face. As I had no hat I tried to fan myself with my handkerchief.

The undertaker's man turned to me and said something that I didn't catch. At that same time he wiped the crown of his head with a handkerchief that he held in his left hand, while with his right he tilted up his hat. I asked him what he'd said. He pointed upward.

"Sun's pretty bad today, ain't it?"

"Yes," I said.

After a while he asked: "Is it your mother we're burying?"

"Yes," I said again.

"What was her age?"

"Well, she was getting on." As a matter of fact, I didn't know exactly how old she was.

After that he kept silent. Looking back, I saw Pérez limping along some fifty yards behind. He was swinging his big felt hat at arm's length, trying to make the pace. I also had a look at the warden. He was walking with carefully measured steps, economizing every gesture. Beads of perspiration glistened on his forehead, but he didn't wipe them off.

I had an impression that our little procession was moving slightly faster. Wherever I looked I saw the same sun-drenched countryside, and the sky was so dazzling that I dared not raise my eyes. Presently we struck a patch of freshly tarred road. A shimmer of heat played over it and one's feet squelched at each step, leaving bright black gashes. In front, the coachman's glossy black hat looked like a lump of the same sticky substance, poised above the hearse. It gave one a queer, dreamlike impression, that blue-white glare overhead and all this blackness round one: the sleek black of the hearse, the dull black of the men's clothes, and the silvery-black gashes in the road. And then there were the smells, smells of hot leather and horse dung from the hearse, veined with whiffs of incense smoke. What with these and the hangover from a poor night's sleep, I found my eyes and thoughts growing blurred.

I looked back again. Pérez seemed very far away now, almost hidden by the heat haze; then, abruptly, he disappeared altogether. After puzzling over it for a bit, I guessed that he had turned off the road into the fields. Then I noticed that there was a bend of the road a little way ahead. Obviously Pérez, who knew the district well, had taken a short cut, so as to catch up with us. He rejoined us soon after we were round the bend; then began to lose ground again. He took another short cut and met us again farther on; in fact, this happened several times during the next half-hour. But soon I lost interest in his movements; my temples were throbbing and I could hardly drag myself along.

After that everything went with a rush; and also with such precision and matter-of-factness that I remember hardly any details. Except that when we were on the outskirts of the village the nurse said something to me. Her voice took me by surprise; it didn't match her face at all; it was musical and slightly tremulous. What she said was: "If you go too slowly there's the risk of a heatstroke. But, if you go too fast, you perspire, and the cold air in the church gives you a chill." I saw her point; either way one was in for it.

Some other memories of the funeral have stuck in my mind. The old boy's face, for instance, when he caught up with us for the last time, just outside the village. His eyes were streaming with tears, of exhaustion or distress, or both together. But because of the wrinkles they couldn't flow down. They spread out, crisscrossed, and formed a smooth gloss on the old, worn face.

And I can remember the look of the church, the villagers in the street, the red geraniums on the graves, Pérez's fainting fit — he crumpled up like a rag doll — the tawny-red earth pattering on Mother's coffin, the bits of white roots mixed up with it; then more people, voices, the wait outside a café for the bus, the rumble of the engine, and my little thrill of pleasure when we entered the first brightly lit streets of Algiers, and I pictured myself going straight to bed and sleeping twelve hours at a stretch.

End of Sample