

PATRICK MODIANO



H O N E Y

M O O N

T R A N S L A T E D B Y

B A R B A R A W R I G H T



"At times [Modiano] reads like a strange cross between Anita Brookner and the Ancient Mariner, forever buttonholing the reader with his own brand of exquisite angst . . . His writing has the spare strength and telling concentration of a Simenon."

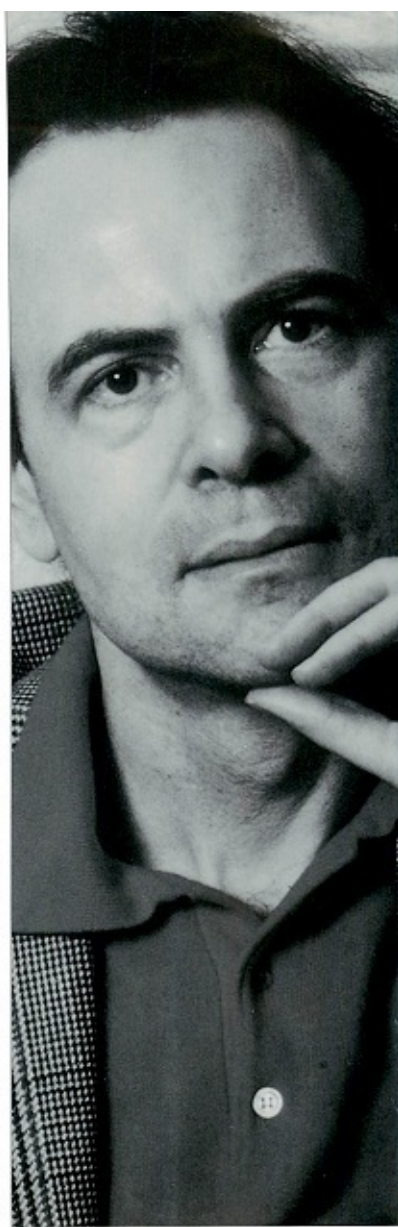
— *The Independent*

"Haunting, ambiguous, and more universal than one might suspect . . . [*Honeymoon*] is shaped by the imperfections and subjectivity of knowledge, and by W.W. II, the black hole of French memory."

— *Publishers Weekly*

Winner of numerous awards, among them France's highest literary honor, the Prix Goncourt, PATRICK MODIANO was born near Paris in 1945. His other writings include the novel *Missing Person* (forthcoming in *Verba Mundi*) and the screenplay *Lacombe Lucien* (with Louis Malle).

VERBA MUNDI  
DAVID R. GODINE, PUBLISHER, INC.  
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Lincoln, Massachusetts 01773



# PATRICK MODIANO

## HONEYMOON

Translated from the French by Barbara Wright

*Verba Mundi*  
David R. Godine, Publisher *Boston*

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*For Robert Gallimard*

First U.S. edition published in 1995 by DAVID R. GODINE, PUBLISHER, INC. Box 9103 Lincoln, Massachusetts 01773

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Modiano, Patrick, 1945 - [Voyages de noces. English] Honeymoon : a novel

by Patrick Modiano; translated by Barbara Wright, p. cm. ISBN 0-87923-947-6

I. Title. PQ2673.03V613 1993 843'.914 dc20 92-39175 CIP

First American edition Printed the United States of America

THERE WILL BE more summer days, but the heat will never again be as oppressive or the streets empty as they were in Milan that Tuesday. It was the day after the fifteenth of August. I had put my suitcase in the left luggage, and outside the station I hesitated for a moment: no one could walk in the town in that blazing sun. Five in the afternoon. Four hours to wait for the Paris train. I had to find some refuge, and I was drawn to an hotel with an imposing façade in an avenue a few hundred metres from the station.

Its pale marble corridors protected you from the sun, and in the cool of the semi-darkness of the bar you were at the bottom of a well. Today, I see that bar as a well, and the hotel as a gigantic blockhouse, but at that moment I was content to drink a mixture of grenadine and orange juice through a straw. I listened to the barman, whose face I have completely forgotten. He was talking to another customer, and I would be quite incapable of describing that man's appearance or dress. Just one thing about him remains in my memory: his way of punctuating the conversation with a "Mah", which reverberated like the dismal bark of a dog.

A woman had committed suicide in one of the hotel rooms two days before, on the eve of the fifteenth of August. The barman was explaining that they had called an ambulance, but in vain. He had seen the woman in the afternoon. She had come into the bar. She was on her own. After the suicide the police had questioned him. He hadn't been able to give them many details. A brunette. The hotel manager had been rather relieved because the event had escaped notice as there were so few guests at this time of year. There had been a paragraph, this morning, in the *Corriere della Sera*. Frenchwoman. What was she doing in Milan in August? They turned to me, as if they expected me to be able to tell them. Then the barman said to me in French:

"People shouldn't come here in August. In Milan, everything's closed in August."

The other agreed, with his dismal "Mah!" And they both turned a reproachful eye on me, to make me fully realize that I had been guilty of an indiscretion, and even worse than an indiscretion, of a rather serious offence, in landing up in Milan in August.

"You can check," the barman told me. "Not a single shop open in Milan today."

I found myself in one of the yellow taxis waiting outside the hotel. Noticing that I was hesitating like a tourist, the driver offered to take me to the Piazza del Duomo.

There was no one in the avenues, and all the shops were shut. I wondered whether the woman they had been talking about just now had also crossed Milan in a yellow taxi before going back to the hotel and killing herself. I don't believe I thought at the time that the sight of that deserted town could have induced her to come to her decision. On the contrary, if I try to find words to convey the impression Milan made on me on that sixteenth of August, the ones that immediately come to mind are: Open City. The city, it seemed to me, was allowing itself a respite, but the noise and bustle would start up again, of that I was sure.

In the Piazza del Duomo, tourists wearing caps were wandering around outside the cathedral, and a big bookshop was lit up at the entrance to the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele. I was the only customer, and I browsed through the books under the brilliant light. Had she come to this bookshop on the eve of the fifteenth of August? I wanted to ask the man sitting behind a desk at the back of the shop, by the art books. But I knew hardly anything about her except that she was a brunette, and French.

I walked down the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele. Every living being in Milan had taken refuge there to escape the sun's deadly rays: children around an ice-cream seller, Japanese and Germans, Italian from the South, visiting the city for the first time. If I had been there three days before, we might perhaps have met in the gallery, that woman and I, and as we were both French we would have spoken to one another.

Still two hours to go before the Paris train. Once again I got into one of the yellow taxis at the railway in the Piazza del Duomo, and gave the driver the name of the hotel. Night was falling. Today, the

avenues, the gardens, the trams of that foreign city and the heat that isolates you even more, are for me all linked to that woman's suicide. But at the time, in the taxi, I told myself that it was just an unfortunate coincidence.

The barman was alone. He gave me another grenadine and orange juice.

"Well, satisfied? ... The shops are shut in Milan ..."

I asked him whether the woman had been at the hotel long, the one who, as he rather deferentially put it, "had taken her own life."

"No, no ... Three days before she took her own life ..."

"Where was she from?"

"From Paris. She was going to join some friends on holiday in the South. In Capri ... That's what the police said ... Someone is supposed to be coming from Capri tomorrow to sort out all the problems ..."

To sort out all the problems! What did these lugubrious words have in common with the azure, the sea grottoes, the summer gaiety that Capri conjured up?

"A very pretty woman ... She was sitting there..."

He pointed to a table, right at the back.

"I gave her the same drink as you ..."

Time for my train. It was dark outside, but the heat was as stifling as it had been in the middle of the afternoon. I crossed the avenue, my gaze fixed on the monumental façade of the station. In the enormous left-luggage hall I searched all my pockets for the ticket that would enable me to regain possession of my suitcase.

I had bought the *Corriere della Sera*. I wanted to read the paragraph about that woman. She had no doubt arrived from Paris at the platform where I now was, and I was going to make the journey in reverse, five days later ... What a strange idea to come and commit suicide here, when friends are waiting for you in Capri ... What had caused her to do it I might never know.

I WAS BACK in Milan again last week, but I didn't leave the airport. It wasn't as it had been eighteen years earlier. Yes: eighteen years, I counted them on my fingers. This time I didn't take a yellow taxi to drive me to the Piazza del Duomo and the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele. It was raining, heavy June rain. Barely an hour's wait, and I would board a plane to take me back to Paris.

I was in transit, sitting in a big glazed lounge in Linate. I thought about that day eighteen years before, and for the first time in all those years, the woman who "took her own life"—as the barman had put it—really began to preoccupy me.

I had bought the return air ticket for Milan at random the day before, in a travel agency in the Rue Jouffroy. When I got home I had hidden it at the bottom of one of my suitcases because of Annette, my wife. Milan. I had chosen that destination at random, out of three others: Vienna, Athens, Lisbon. It didn't matter which city. The only problem was to choose a plane leaving at the same time as the one I was supposed to be taking for Rio de Janeiro.

They had come with me to the airport: Annette, Wetzel and Cavanaugh. They were showing signs of the artificial gaiety I had often observed at the start of our expeditions. Personally, I have never liked going away, and that day I liked it even less than usual. I wanted to tell them that we were too old for the profession that can only be described by the antiquated name of "explorer". How much longer would we go on showing our documentary films in the Salle Pleyel or in the provincial cinemas that were becoming fewer all the time? When we were very young we had wanted to follow the example of our elders, but it was already too late for us. There was no more virgin territory to explore.

"Be sure and phone us as soon as you get to Rio ..." Wetzel had said.

It was to have been a routine expedition: a new documentary I was to make which was to be called like so many others: *In the footsteps of Colonel Fawcett*, an excuse to film a few villages bordering the Mato Grosso plateau. This time I had decided that I wouldn't be seen in Brazil, but I didn't dare confess it to Annette and the others. They wouldn't have understood. And anyway, Annette was waiting for me to leave, so as to be alone with Cavanaugh.

"Remember us to the crew in Brazil," Cavanaugh said.

He was referring to the film crew who had already left, and were waiting for me on the other side of the Ocean at the Hotel Souza in Rio de Janeiro. Well, they'd have to wait a long time for me ... After forty-eight hours they would begin to feel vaguely worried. They'd phone Paris. Annette would answer, Cavanaugh would pick up the earpiece. Disappeared, yes, I'd disappeared. Like Colonel Fawcett. But with this difference: I had vanished at the very start of the expedition, which would worry them even more, because they would discover that my seat in the Rio plane hadn't been occupied.

I told them I'd rather they didn't see me into the departure lounge, and I turned round towards the little group with the thought that I would never see them again in my whole life. Wetzel and Cavanaugh still looked very dashing, no doubt because of our profession which wasn't really a profession, but simply a way of pursuing childhood dreams. How much longer would we go on being old young people? They waved goodbye to me. I was moved by Annette. She and I were exactly the same age, and she'd become one of those slightly faded Danish beauties who used to attract me when I was twenty. They were older than I was at that time, and I was grateful for their tender protection.

I waited until they left the building and then made my way towards the boarding gate for the Milan plane. I could have gone straight back to Paris on the sly. But I felt I had to put a distance between them and me first.

For a moment, in that transit lounge, I was tempted to leave the airport and follow the same itinerary through the streets of Milan as in the past. But that was pointless. She had come to die here by chance.

It was in Paris that I had to pick up her traces.

~~During the return journey I let myself drift into a state of euphoria such as I hadn't experienced since my first trip to the Pacific Islands when I was twenty-five. There had been many other journeys after that one. Was it the example of Stanley, or Savorgnan de Brazza, or Alain Gerbault, whose exploits I had read of in my childhood? Above all, it was the need to escape. I felt it in me, more violently than ever. There, in the plane taking me back to Paris, I had the impression of having escaped further even than if I had flown, as I should have, to Rio.~~

I know a lot of hotels in suburban Paris, and I had decided to switch regularly. The first in which I took a room was the Dodds Hotel, at the Porte Dorée. There I ran no risk of bumping into Annette. After I had left, Cavanaugh had certainly taken her to his flat in the Avenue Duquesne. Perhaps she hadn't heard of my disappearance right away, because no one—not even Wetzel—knew that she was Cavanaugh's mistress, and the phone must have rung in vain at our place, in the Cité Véron. And then, after a few days of their honeymoon, she would finally have gone back to the Cité Véron where a telegram—I suppose—would be waiting for her: "Rio crew very worried. Jean not on plane 18th. Phone Hotel Souza Rio urgently." And Cavanaugh would have gone to join her at the Cité Véron, to share her distress.

Personally, I don't feel the slightest bit distressed. But elated, highly elated. And I refuse to allow all this to be over-dramatized: I'm too old, now. As soon as I run out of cash I shall try to come to an understanding with Annette. A phone call to the Cité Véron wouldn't be wise, because of Cavanaugh's presence. But I shall easily find a way to make a secret date with Annette. And I shall ensure her silence. Up to her, from then on, to discourage anyone who might want to go and look for me. She is clever enough to cover my tracks, and to cover them so successfully that it will be as if I had never existed.

It's a fine day today, at the Porte Dorée. But the heat isn't as oppressive and the streets are not so empty as in Milan that day eighteen years ago. Over there, on the other side of the Boulevard Soufflot and the square with the fountains, groups of tourists are crowding round the entrance to the zoo, and others are going up the steps to the former Colonial Museum. It has played a part in our lives, the museum, which Cavanaugh, Wetzel and I used to visit as children, and the zoo too. There we dreamed of far-off countries, and of expeditions from which there was no return.

And here I am, back at my point of departure. I too, in a few minutes, will buy a ticket to visit the zoo. A few weeks from now there'll probably be a short article in some paper or other announcing the disappearance of Jean B. Annette will follow my instructions and get them to believe that I vanished into thin air during my last trip to Brazil. Time will pass, and I shall appear after Fawcett and Mauffrais in the list of lost explorers. No one will ever guess that I landed up on the outskirts of Paris and that that was the aim of my journey.

Obituary writers imagine that they can summon up the whole course of a life. But they know nothing. Eighteen years ago, lying on my couchette, I read the paragraph in the *Corriere della Sera*. My heart missed a beat: the woman who had taken her life, as the barman had put it, was somebody I had known. The train stayed in the station in Milan for a long time, and I was so shattered that I wondered whether I oughtn't to leave the carriage and go back to the hotel, as if I still had a chance to see her again.

The *Corriere della Sera* had got her age wrong. She was forty-five. They called her by her maiden name, though she was still married to Rigaud. But who was to know that, apart from Rigaud, me, and

bureaucrat or two? Could they really be blamed for such a mistake, and after all wasn't it more reasonable to give her maiden name, the one she had gone by for the first twenty years of her life?

The hotel barman had said that someone was going to come "to sort out all the problems". Was that Rigaud? As the train began to move, I imagined myself face to face with a Rigaud who would no longer have been the same man that he was six years before, given the circumstances. Would he have recognized me? In the six years since they had crossed my path, Ingrid and he, I hadn't seen him again.

But I had seen Ingrid once in Paris. Without Rigaud.

A silent, moonlit suburb was going slowly by outside the window. I was alone in the compartment. I had only switched on the night-light above my couchette. I would only have had to arrive in Milan three days earlier, and I could have met her in the hotel lobby. I had thought the same thing, the afternoon, in the taxi taking me to the Piazza del Duomo, but I hadn't known then that it was Ingrid.

What would we have talked about? And what if she had pretended not to recognize me? Pretended? But she must already have been feeling so far away from everything that she wouldn't even have noticed me. Or if she had, she would have exchanged a few strictly conventional words with me before leaving me for ever.

You can no longer climb the big rock in the zoo, the one they call the Chamois' Rock, by the steps inside it. It's in danger of collapsing, and is enveloped in a kind of net. The cement is cracked in places, revealing the rusty iron rods in the armature. But I was glad to see the giraffes and elephants again. Saturday. A lot of tourists were taking photos. And families who hadn't gone on holiday yet, or who wouldn't be going, were coming into the Vincennes Zoo as if it were a summer resort.

At the moment I'm sitting on a bench facing Lake Daumesnil. Later, I shall go back to the Dodo Hotel, which is very near, in one of those blocks flanking the former Colonial Museum. From my bedroom window I shall look out at the square and the play of the fountains. Could I have imagined, at the time I met Ingrid and Rigaud, that I'd land up here, at the Porte Dorée, after more than twenty years of journeys in far-off countries?

When I got back from Milan that summer, I wanted to find out more about Ingrid's suicide. The phone number she'd given me when I had seen her alone in Paris, for the first and last time, didn't answer. And in any case, she'd told me that she no longer lived with Rigaud. I found another number, the one Rigaud had scribbled down when they had taken me to the station in Saint-Raphaël, six years before, KLÉBER 83-85.

A woman's voice told me "we haven't seen Monsieur Rigaud for a long time." Could I write to him? "If you like, Monsieur. I can't promise he'll get it." So I asked her for the address of KLÉBER 83-85. It was an apartment block in the Rue Spontini. Write to him? But words of condolence didn't seem to me to be right either for Ingrid or for him.

I began to travel. The memory of them faded. I had only met them in passing, her and Rigaud, and we had had only a superficial relationship. It was three years after Ingrid's suicide, one summer night in Paris where I was on my own—in transit, more precisely: I was just back from Oceania and I was to leave for Rio de Janeiro a few days later—that I once again felt the urge to phone KLÉBER 83-85. I remember that I went into a big hotel in the Rue de Rivoli to make the call. Before giving the operator the number I paced up and down the lobby preparing what I was going to say to Rigaud. I was afraid of becoming speechless with stage fright. But on that occasion, no one answered.

And the years followed one another, and the journeys, and the documentaries screened at the Salle Pleyel and elsewhere, without my mind being particularly occupied by Ingrid and Rigaud. The evening when I had tried one last time to phone Rigaud was a summer evening like this one: the same heat, and a sense of strangeness and solitude, but so diluted in comparison with the feeling I now have ... It was



no more than the impression of time standing still that a traveller has between two planes. Cavanaugh and Wetzel were to join me a few days later and we were all three going to leave for Rio.

Life was still humming with movement and glorious projects.

Just now, before I went back to the hotel, I was surprised to see that the façade of the former Colonial Museum and the fountains in the square were illuminated. Two tourist coaches were parked at the start of the Boulevard Soult. Did the zoo stay open at night just before the fourteenth of July? What on earth could bring tourists to this district at nine in the evening?

I wondered whether Annette would be entertaining all our friends next week, as we did every year on the fourteenth of July, on our big terrace in the Cité Véron. I was almost sure she would: she would need people round her, because of my disappearance. And Cavanaugh would certainly encourage her not to give up this custom.

I walked along the Boulevard Soult. The apartment blocks were silhouetted against the light. Occasionally there was a big patch of sunlight on one of their façades. I noticed some too, from time to time, on the pavements. These contrasts of light and shade in the setting sun, this heat and the deserted boulevard ... Casablanca. Yes, I was walking down one of those broad avenues in Casablanca. Night fell. The din of the televisions reached me through the open windows. Once again, it was Paris. I went into a phone box and looked in the book for the name: Rigaud. A whole column of Rigauds with their Christian names. But I couldn't remember his.

And yet I felt certain that Rigaud was still alive, somewhere in one of these suburban districts. How many men and women who you imagine are dead or have disappeared live in these apartment blocks that mark the outskirts of Paris ... I had already spotted two or three, at the Porte Dorée, with the reflection of their past on their face. They could tell you a long story, but they will remain silent to the end, and they are completely indifferent to the fact that the world has forgotten them.

In my room at the Dodds Hotel, I was thinking that all summers are alike. The June rains, the days, the evenings of the fourteenth of July when we entertained our friends, Annette and I, on the terrace in the Cité Véron ... But the summer when I met Ingrid and Rigaud was truly of another kind. There had still been lightness in the air.

When was the turning point in my life, after which summers suddenly seemed to me to be different from the ones I had known up to then? It would be difficult to decide. No precise frontier. The summer of Ingrid's suicide in Milan? I hadn't thought it any different from all the others. It's only now, remembering the deserted, sunbaked streets and the stifling heat in the yellow taxi, that I experience in retrospect the same malaise as I do today in Paris in July.

For a long time—and this particular time with greater force than usual—summer has been a season that gives me a sense of emptiness and absence, and takes me back to the past. Is it the too-harsh light, the silence of the streets, those contrasts of the shade and the setting sun, the other evening, on the façades of the buildings in the Boulevard Soult? The past and the present merge in my mind through the phenomenon of superimposition. That's where the malaise must come from. It's a malaise that I don't only feel in a state of solitude, as today, but at all our fourteenth of July parties, on the terrace in the Cité Véron. I can still hear Wetzel or Cavanaugh saying to me: "What is it, Jean, is something the matter? You ought to have a glass of champagne..." or Annette would press herself against me, stroke my lips with her finger, and whisper in my ear with her Danish accent: "What are you thinking about Jeannot? Tell me you still love me?" And I can hear bursts of laughter around us, the murmur of conversation, music.

That summer the malaise didn't exist, nor did this strange superimposition of the past on the present was twenty. I was returning from Vienna by train, and I'd got off at Saint-Raphaël. Nine in the morning. I wanted to get a bus to Saint-Tropez. Searching one of my jacket pockets, I discovered that all my remaining money had been stolen: three hundred francs. I immediately decided not to ask myself any questions about my future. It was a fine morning, and the heat was as oppressive as it is today, but in those days that didn't bother me.

I had stationed myself just outside Saint-Raphaël, hoping to hitch a lift along the coast road. I waited about half an hour and then a black car stopped. The first thing that struck me was that it was the woman who was driving, and the man was sitting at the back. She leaned out of the open window. She was wearing sunglasses.

"Where are you making for?"

"Saint-Tropez."

She nodded, as a sign that I could get in.

They didn't say a word. I tried to think of something to say, to get the conversation going.

"Are you on holiday?"

"Yes, yes..."

She had answered absent-mindedly. He, on the back seat, was studying a map that was much bigger than the Michelin maps. I could see him clearly, in the rear-view mirror.

"We're just coming to Les Issambres."

She looked at the signs on the side of the road. Then she turned her face to me:

"Would you mind if we stopped for a moment at Les Issambres?"

She said this quite naturally, as if we'd known each other for a long time.

"We'll stop, but then we'll go on to Saint-Tropez," he told me with a smile.

He had folded his map and put it down beside him on the seat. I reckoned they were both about thirty-five. She was dark, and had light eyes. He had short hair brushed back, a massive face and a slightly squashed nose. He was wearing a suede jacket.

"This must be it ... The chap's waiting for us ..."

He leaned over towards her and put his hand on her shoulder. A man in a summer suit, carrying a heavy black briefcase, was pacing up and down in front of the iron gate outside a villa. She parked the car on the pavement, a few metres away from the gate.

"We'll only be a moment," she said. "Can you wait for us in the car?"

He got out first, and went and opened the door for her. When she was out, he shut the door himself. Then he put his head through the open window.

"If you get bored, you can have a cigarette ... There's a packet in the glove compartment..."

They walked up to the man with the briefcase. I noticed that he had a slight limp, but he held himself very straight, and put his arm round her shoulder with a protective gesture. They shook hands with the man with the briefcase, who opened the gate and let them precede him.

Looking for the packet of cigarettes in the glove compartment, I knocked a passport out of it. Before I put it back, I opened it: I couldn't say whether I did so automatically or whether I was prompted by simple curiosity. A French passport in the name of Ingrid Teyrsen, married name Rigaud. What surprised me was that she had been born in Austria, in Vienna, the town I'd been living in for a few months. I lit a cigarette, but the very first puff made me feel sick. I had spent a sleepless night in the train, and I hadn't eaten since lunch the previous day.

I didn't get out of the car. I tried to ward off my exhaustion, but every now and then I fell into a kind of doze. I heard the murmur of a conversation and opened my eyes: they were standing near the car.

with the man with the black briefcase. They shook hands, and he strode off across the avenue.

I opened the door and got out of the car.

"Wouldn't you like to sit in front?" I asked the man.

"No ... no ... I have to sit in the back because of my leg... I still can't quite bend it ... An old injury my knee..."

It was almost as if he was trying to reassure me. He smiled at me. Was he the Rigaud mentioned in the passport?

"You can get in," she said to me with a charming frown.

She opened the glove compartment and took a cigarette, She drove off with a slight jerk. He was sitting sideways on the back seat, with one of his legs resting on it.

She drove slowly, and I had difficulty in keeping my eyes open.

"Are you on holiday?" she asked me.

I was afraid they would ask me other, more precise questions: What's your address? Are you a student?

"Not really on holiday," I said. "I'm not quite sure whether I'll stay here."

"We live in a little house near Pampelonne beach," she told me. "But we're looking for something else to rent ... While you were waiting for us we were visiting a villa ... It's a pity ... I find it too big ..."

Behind us, he remained silent. He was massaging his knee with one hand.

"What I liked was the name: Les Issambres ... Don't you think that's a nice name?"

And she looked at me from behind her sunglasses.

At the entrance to Saint-Tropez we turned right and took the road along the beaches.

"From here on, I always take the wrong road," she said.

"You go straight on."

He spoke in a low voice, with a slight Paris accent, which gave me the idea of asking them whether they lived in Paris.

"Yes, but we may come and live here for good," she said.

"And you, do you live in Paris?"

I turned round towards him. His leg was still lying across the seat. I had the impression that he was giving me an ironical look.

"Yes. I live in Paris."

"With your parents?"

"No."

"Leave him alone," she said. "We aren't the police."

The sea appeared in the background, slightly below the road, beyond an expanse of vines and pines.

"You've gone too far again," he said. "You should have turned left."

She made a U-turn, and only just avoided a car coming in the opposite direction.

"Aren't you frightened?" he asked me. "Ingrid is a very bad driver. In a few days, when my leg is better, I'll be able to drive again."

We had turned into a little road at the beginning of which was a signpost: TAHITI-MOOREA.

"Have you got a driving licence?" she asked me.

"Yes."

"Then you can drive instead of me. It'd be wiser."

She stopped at a crossroads, and I was getting ready to take her place at the wheel when she said:

"No ... no ... Not right away ... Later..."

"It's on the left," he told her.

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And he pointed to another signpost: TAHITI-MOOREA

The road was now nothing but a track bordered by reeds. We had driven round a wall with a navy-blue door in it. She stopped the car outside the door.

"I'd rather go home by the beach," he said.

We continued along the reed track and came to a piece of ground used as a car park for the Moorea restaurant. We parked the car and then crossed the deserted terrace of the restaurant. We were on the beach.

"It's a bit farther on," he said. "We can walk there ..."

She had removed her espadrilles and taken his arm. He still limped, but in a less pronounced fashion than before.

"There's no one on the beach yet," she said to me. "This is the time of day I like best."

The property was separated from the beach by a wire fence with holes in it. We slid through one of the holes. About fifty metres farther on there was a bungalow which reminded me of the motels on American expressways. It was in the shade of a little pinewood.

"The main villa is over there," he told me.

In the background I could make out, through the pines, a big, white one-storey building in the Moorish or Spanish style, which surrounded a swimming pool with blue mosaics. Someone was bathing in the pool.

"The owners live there," he told me. "We rented their gardener's house from them."

She came out of the bungalow in a sky-blue swimming costume. We had waited for her, he and I, sitting on the deck chairs in front of the sliding glass doors.

"You look tired," he said. "You can rest here. We're going down to the beach ... just in front..."

She looked at me in silence, from behind her dark glasses. Then she said:

"You ought to have a siesta."

And she pointed to a big pneumatic mattress at the foot of a clump of pines by the side of the bungalow.

I was lying on the mattress, staring at the sky and the top of the pines. I could hear shouts coming from the swimming pool, down below, and the sound of people diving. Above me, between the branches, the play of sun and shade. I let myself sink into a delightful torpor. Remembering it now, it seems to me that that was one of the rare moments in my life when I experienced a sense of well-being that I could even call Happiness. In that semi-somnolent state, occasionally interrupted by a shaft of sunlight piercing the shade of the pines and dazzling me, I considered it perfectly natural that they had taken me home with them, as if we had known each other for a long time. In any case, I had no choice. I'd just have to wait and see how things would go. I finally fell asleep.

I could hear them talking by my side, but I couldn't open my eyes. An orange light was filtering through my eyelids. I felt the pressure of a hand on my shoulder. "Well? Have a good sleep?"

I sat up abruptly. He was wearing linen trousers, a black polo-neck, and sunglasses. And she, a bare

robe. Her hair was wet. She must have just been bathing.

"It's nearly three o'clock," he said. "Will you have lunch with us?"

"I don't want to impose upon you."

I was still half asleep.

"But you won't be imposing upon us in the least ... Will he, Ingrid?"

"Not in the least."

She smiled, and looked intently at me with her pale blue or grey eyes.

We walked along the beach to the terrace of the Moorea restaurant. Most of the tables were empty. We sat down at the one that was protected from the sun by a green sun umbrella. A man with the physique of a former ski instructor came to take our order.

"The usual," she said. "For three."

The sun enveloped the beach, the sea, and the Moorea terrace in a sheet of silence. And against the background of silence, the slightest sound stood out with unusual acuity: the voices of a group of people in swimming costumes at a table some way away from ours, whose conversation we could follow as if they were sitting next to us; the drone of a Chriscraft gliding over the calm sea and from time to time letting itself float, its engine switched off. And then we heard the laughter and shouts of the people on board.

"If I understand rightly," he said to me, "you weren't making for anywhere in particular."

"No."

"You were just drifting ..."

Not the slightest irony in his voice. On the contrary, I detected fellow-feeling in it.

"But unfortunately, I have to get back to Paris as soon as possible for my work."

"What kind of work?"

This time it was she who was questioning me, her pale eyes still fixed on me.

"I write articles for geographical magazines ..."

I was only half lying. I had written a long article on the journalist and explorer Henry M. Stanley and sent it to a travel magazine, but I still didn't know whether it would be published.

"And you've just come back from a trip?" he asked.

"Yes. From Austria. Vienna."

I was hoping to steer the conversation round to Vienna. She ought to know it well, seeing that she had been born there. To my great astonishment, she didn't react.

"It's a very beautiful city, Vienna."

It was no use my insisting. Vienna didn't mean a thing to her.

"And you, do you work in Paris?"

"I've retired," he answered with a smile, but in an abrupt tone which discouraged further questions.

"I'm going to bathe. Will you wait here for me?"

She stood up and took off her white bath robe. I watched her in the heat haze. She crossed the beach and then walked into the sea, and when the water came up to her waist she began to swim on her back.

We met again in the shade of the pines by the bungalow. We played a game of cards they taught me whose rules were very simple. That was the only time in my life that I have played cards. And then we got to the end of the afternoon.

"I'm going to do a bit of shopping," she said.

He turned towards me:

"Could you go with her? It'd be wiser ... She hasn't got a driving licence ... I didn't want to tell you earlier ... You might have been afraid we'd be stopped on the Saint-Raphaël road ..."

He gave a short little laugh.

"I'm not afraid of anything," I told him.

"You're right ... Nor were we, either, at your age ..."

"But we're still not afraid of anything," she said, raising her index finger.

I always kept my passport and driving licence in the inside pocket of my jacket. I sat at the wheel. I had trouble in moving off and getting out of the Moorea car park, because I hadn't driven for some time.

"I have a feeling that you drive even worse than I do," she said.

She showed me the way. Once again the little track bordered by bamboos. It was so narrow that every time a car came in the opposite direction I had to pull in on to the verge.

"Would you like me to take over?" she asked.

"No, no. It'll be quite all right."

I parked the car outside the Hôtel de Paris, whose façade and little windows with their wooden shutters made it look like an hotel in the mountains, and we walked down to the port. It was the time of day when groups of tourists were strolling along the quayside admiring the moored yachts, or trying to find a free table on the terrace of Senéquier's. She bought a few things at the chemist's. She asked me whether I needed anything, and after a moment's hesitation I confessed that I needed some Extra Blade Gillette razor blades and some shaving cream, but that I hadn't any money on me. Then we went to the bookshop where she picked out a detective story. Next, to the port's *bar-tabac*. She bought a few packets of cigarettes. We had difficulty in making our way through the crowd.

A little later, though, we were the only ones walking through the alleyways in the old town. I went back to that place in the course of the following years, and walked along the port and the same little streets with Annette, Wetzell and Cavanaugh. I couldn't help it, I couldn't entirely share the lightheartedness and *joie de vivre*. I was somewhere else, in another summer, more and more distant, and with time the light of that summer underwent a curious transformation: far from fading, like over-exposed photos, the contrasts of sun and shade became so accentuated that I recall everything black and white.

We walked down the Rue de la Ponche, and when we'd passed the arch we stopped in the square overlooking the Port des Pêcheurs. She pointed to the terrace of a derelict house.

"My husband and I used to live up there, a very long time ago ... You weren't even born ..."

Her pale eyes were still fixed on me, with their absent expression which intimidated me. But she was frowning in the way I had already noticed, which made her look as if she was gently mocking me.

"How about a little stroll?"

In the sloping garden at the foot of the Citadelle, we sat down on a bench.

"Have you parents?"

"I don't see them any more," I told her.

"Why not?"

That frown again. What could I answer? Strange sort of parents, who had always tried to find me a boarding school or reformatory where they could get rid of me.

"When I saw you by the side of the road this morning, I wondered whether you had parents."

We went back to the port down the Rue de la Citadelle.

She took my arm because of the sloping road. The contact of her arm and shoulder gave me an impression I had never yet had, that of finding myself under someone's protection. She would be the first person who could help me. I felt lightheaded. All those waves of tenderness that she communicated to me through the simple contact of her arm, and the pale blue look she gave me from time to time—I didn't know that such things could happen, in life.

We had come back to the bungalow along the beach. We were sitting in the deck chairs. Night had fallen, and the light from the bungalow was shining on us through one of the glass doors.

"A game of cards?" he said. "But you don't seem all that keen on such activities ..."

"Did we play cards at his age?"

She called him to witness, and he smiled.

"We didn't have time to play cards."

He had said this in a low voice, for himself alone, and I would have been curious to know what they had done for a living at that time.

"You can stay the night here, if you have nowhere else to go," she said.

I was ashamed at the idea that they took me for a tramp.

"Thank you ... I'd like to, if it's not too much of an imposition ..."

It was difficult to say, and I dug my nails into the palms of my hands to give myself courage. But the worst thing still remained to be confessed:

"I've got to go back to Paris tomorrow. Unfortunately, all my remaining money was stolen."

Rather than hang my head, I looked her straight in the eyes, waiting for her verdict. Once again, she frowned.

"And that bothers you?"

"Don't worry," he said. "We'll find you a seat on the train tomorrow."

Above us, behind the pines, the villa and its swimming pool were lit up, and I could see silhouettes gliding over the blue mosaic.

"They have parties every night," he said. "They stop us sleeping. That's why we're looking for another house."

He suddenly looked worn out.

"At the beginning, they were always inviting us to their parties," she said. "So we used to turn on all the lights in the bungalow and pretend we weren't there."

"We'd sit in the dark. One evening they came down to fetch us. We took refuge under the pines, over there ..."

Why were they adopting this confidential, or even confessional tone with me, as if they were trying to justify themselves?

"Do you know them?" I asked.

"Yes, yes, a little," he said. "But we don't want to see them ..."

"We've become savages," she said.

Voices were approaching. A little group, about fifty metres away, was coming along the pine-bordered path.

"Do you mind if we put the light out?" he asked me.

He went into the bungalow and the light went out, leaving us, her and me, in the semi-darkness. She put her hand on my wrist.

"Now," she said, "we must talk very quietly."

And she smiled at me. Behind us, he shut the sliding glass door slowly, so as not to make a noise, and came and sat down on the deck chair again. The others were very close now, just by the path.

leading to the bungalow. I heard one of them keep repeating in a husky voice:

"But I swear I did! I swear I did ..."

---

"If they come right up to us, we'll just have to pretend to be asleep," he said.

I thought of the curious sight we should present to them, asleep on our deck chairs in the dark.

"And if they tap us on the shoulder to wake us up?" I asked.

"Well, in that case we'll pretend to be dead," she said.

But they left the bungalow path and went down the slope under the pines in the direction of the beach. In the moonlight, I could make out two men and three women.

"The danger's over," he said. "We'd better stay in the dark. They might quite likely see the light from the beach."

I didn't know whether it was a game or whether he was in earnest.

"Does our attitude surprise you?" she asked me, in a gentle voice. "There are moments when we are incapable of exchanging a single word with anybody ... It's beyond us ..."

Their silhouettes could be seen on the beach. They took off their clothes and put them down on a tree trunk carved into the shape of a Polynesian totem pole, whose shadow gave you the impression of being on the shore of a lagoon, somewhere in the South Seas. The women, stark naked, ran down to the sea. The men pretended to chase them, uttering roars. Snatches of music and the hum of conversation came from the villa in the background.

"It lasts until three in the morning," he said in a weary voice. "They dance and go for midnight bathes."

For several moments we remained silent, in our deck chairs, in the dark, as if we were hiding.

It was she who woke me. When I opened my eyes I saw that pale blue or grey gaze fixed on me once again. She opened the sliding glass door of the bedroom and the morning sunshine dazzled me. We and the three had breakfast outside. The scent of the pines was floating around us. Down below, the beach was deserted. No trace of their midnight bathes. Not a single article of clothing left behind on the Polynesian totem pole.

"If you'd like to stay here for a few days, you can," he said. "You won't be in our way."

I was tempted to say yes. Once again that tenderness, that feeling of exaltation swept over me, as I had when I was walking down the sloping street with her. To allow oneself to live from day to day. To stop asking oneself questions about the future. To be in the company of kindly people who help you get over your difficulties, and give you gradual confidence in yourself.

"I have to go back to Paris ... For my work..."

They offered to drive me to the station in Saint-Raphaël. No, it was no trouble. In any case, they had to visit the Les Issandres house again. This time he drove, and I got into the back.

"I hope you won't be frightened," she said, turning towards me. "He drives even worse than we do."

He drove too fast, and I often had to cling on to the seat at the bends. My hand finally strayed on her shoulder, and just as I was about to take it away he braked violently because of another bend which made her grip my wrist very hard.

"He's going to kill us," she said.

"No, no, don't worry. It won't be for this time."

At the station in Saint-Raphaël he made his way rapidly to the booking office, while she kept me back at the bookstall.

"Could you find me a detective story?" she asked.

I looked through the shelves and chose a book in the *Série Noire*.

"That'll do," she said.



He joined us. He handed me a ticket.

~~"I got you a first class one. It'll be more comfortable."~~

---

I was embarrassed. I tried to find the words to thank him.

"You didn't need ..."

He shrugged his shoulders and bought a book in the *Série Noire*. Then they came with me on to the platform. There were about ten minutes to wait for the train. We all three sat down on a bench.

"I'd very much like to see you again," I said.

"We have a phone number in Paris. We shall probably be there this winter."

He took a pen out of the inner pocket of his jacket, tore the endpaper out of his detective novel and wrote his name and phone number on it. Then he folded the page and gave it to me.

I got into the carriage, and they both stood by the door, waiting for the train to start.

"You'll be left in peace ..." he said. "There's no one in these compartments."

As the train began to move, she took off her sunglasses and I met her pale blue or grey eyes again.

"Good luck," she said.

At Marseilles, I went through my travel bag to make sure I had my passport, and I discovered tucked under the collar of a shirt, a few bank notes. I wondered whether it was she or he who had had the idea of leaving me this money. Perhaps both at the same time.

I TOOK ADVANTAGE of the fourteenth of July to creep into our flat in the Cité Véron without attracting anyone's attention. I went up the staircase that no one uses any more, behind the Moulin Rouge. On the third floor, the door opens on to a utility room. Before my false departure for Rio de Janeiro I had taken the key to this door—an old Bricard key whose existence Annette has no suspicion of—and conspicuously left on my bedside table the only key she knows, the one to the front door of the flat. So even if she had guessed that I'd stayed in Paris, she knew that I had left my key behind, and consequently that it was impossible for me to get into the flat unexpectedly.

No light in the utility room. I groped my way to the handle of the door that opens on to a little bedroom, which would have been called "the children's room" if Annette and I had had any. A booklined corridor leads to the big room we use as a salon. I walked on tiptoe, but I was in no danger. They were all up above, on the terrace. I could hear the murmur of their conversation. Life was continuing without me. For a moment I was tempted to climb the narrow stairs with their plaited-roped hand rail and their life buoys hanging on the walls. I should come out on to the terrace which resembles the upper deck of a liner, because Annette and I had wanted our flat to give us the impression of always being on a cruise: portholes, gangways, rails ... I should come out on to the terrace, and what I might describe as a deathly silence would fall. Then, when they'd got over the surprise, they'd ask me questions, they'd make a fuss of me, there would be even greater gaiety than usual and they'd drink champagne in honour of the revenant.

But I stopped on the first step. No, decidedly, I had no wish to see anyone, or to talk, or to give any explanations, or to carry on with my old life as before. I wanted to go into our bedroom to get a few summer clothes and a pair of moccasins. I turned the doorhandle gently. It was locked on the inside. Below, on the carpet, a thin shaft of light. A couple had left the party while it was in full swing. Who? Annette and Cavanaugh? My widow—for wasn't she my widow if I decided never to reappear?—was she occupying the conjugal bed at this moment with my best friend?

I went into the adjoining room, which I use as a study. The communicating door was ajar. I recognized Annette's voice.

"No, no ... My darling ... Don't be afraid ... No one's going to come and disturb us ..."

"Are you sure? Anyone could leave the terrace and come in here ... Especially Cavanaugh ..."

"No, no ... Cavanaugh won't come... I locked the door..."

From the gentle, protective tones of Annette's first words, I could tell that she wasn't with Cavanaugh. Then I recognized the muffled voice of Ben Smidane, a young man we had elected to the Explorers' Club at the beginning of the year, with Cavanaugh and me as sponsors, a young man who wanted to dedicate himself to searching for the wrecks of boats that had gone down in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, and who Annette had said had "the face of a Greek shepherd".

The light went out in the bedroom, and Annette said in a hoarse voice:

"Don't be afraid, my darling ..."

Then I shut the door gently and switched on the light in my study. I searched the drawers until I found an old dark-green cardboard folder. I put it under my arm and left the room, abandoning my widow and Ben Smidane to their amours.

I stood still for a moment in the middle of the corridor, listening to the hum of the conversation. I thought of Cavanaugh up there, a glass of champagne in his hand, standing at the ship's rail. With the other guests he would be gazing at the Place Blanche which looked like a little fishing port they were about to put into. Unless he had noticed Annette's prolonged absence and was wondering where on earth my widow could have got to.

I saw myself again, twenty years earlier, with Ingrid and Rigaud, in the semi-darkness outside the

bungalow. Around us, shouts and bursts of laughter similar to those now reaching me from the terrace. ~~I was now about the same age as Ingrid and Rigaud were then, and whereas their attitude had seemed to me so strange then, I shared it this evening. I remembered what Ingrid had said: "We'll pretend to be dead."~~

I went down the secret stairway, behind the Moulin Rouge, and found myself back on the boulevard. I crossed the Place Blanche and raised my head in the direction of our terrace. Up there, there was no danger of them spotting me among the crowds of tourists being disgorged from the coaches, and the people out for a stroll on the fourteenth of July. Did they still spare just a little thought for me? Dead down I was very fond of them: my widow, Cavanaugh, Ben Smidane and the other guests. One day I come back to you. I don't yet know the precise date of my resurrection. I shall have to have the strength and the inclination. But this evening I'm going to take the métro to the Porte Dorée. Light. So detached from everything.

WHEN I GOT back, around midnight, the fountains in the square were still illuminated and a few groups, among which I noticed some children, were making their way towards the entrance to the zoo. It had stayed open for the fourteenth of July, and no doubt the animals would remain in their cages and enclosures, half asleep. Why shouldn't I too pay them a nocturnal visit, and thus have the illusion of making our old dream come true: letting ourselves be locked in the zoo overnight?

But I preferred to go back to the Dodds Hotel and lie down on the little cherry-wood bed in my room. I reread the pages contained in the dark-green folder. Notes, and even short chapters, that I had written ten years ago, the rough draft of a project cherished at the time: to write Ingrid's biography.

It was September, in Paris, and for the first time I had begun to have doubts about my life and my profession. From then on I would have to share Annette, my wife, with Cavanaugh, my best friend. The public had lost interest in the documentaries we were bringing back from the antipodes. All those journeys, those countries where they had monsoons, earthquakes, amoebas and virgin forests, had lost their charm for me. Had they ever had any?

Days of doubt and depression. I had five weeks' respite before dragging myself across Asia on the route followed by the 1931 car expedition across central Asia. I cursed the members of that expedition, whose tyre tracks I was obliged to discover. Never had Paris, the *quais* along the Seine and the Place Blanche seemed so attractive. How stupid to leave all that once again ...

The memory of Ingrid was obsessing me, and I had spent the days before my departure in noting down everything I knew about her, which is to say not much ... After the war, Rigaud and Ingrid had lived in the Midi for five or six years, but I had no information about that period. Then Ingrid had gone to America, without Rigaud. She had gone with a film producer. This producer had wanted her to be an extra in a few unimportant films. Rigaud had joined her, she had abandoned the producer and the cinema. She had again separated from Rigaud, who went back to France, and she had spent more years in America—years about which I knew nothing. Then she had returned to France, and Paris. And some time later, to Rigaud. And we were coming to the time when I had met them on the Saint-Raphael road.

I found it distasteful to read all my notes ten years later; it was as if someone else had written them. For instance, the chapter entitled "The American Years". Was I definitely sure that they had loomed so large in her existence?

With time, this episode took on a trivial and almost ridiculous aspect. But when I wrote these notes I was more susceptible to irrelevances and glitter, and I didn't go straight to the nub. How childish was of me to have cut out from a 1951 magazine a colour photo of the Champs-Élysées at night, in the summer, under the pretext that it was in the summer of 1951, on one of the terraces in the Avenue, that Ingrid had made the acquaintance of the American producer ... I had attached this document to my notes, to give a better feeling of the atmosphere in which Ingrid lived when she was twenty-five. The sun umbrellas and the cane chairs on the terraces, the look of a seaside resort that the Avenue des Champs-Élysées still had then, the softness of the Paris evenings that suited her youth so well ... And the name I had noted: Alexandre d'Arc, an old Frenchman from Hollywood, the man who, that evening, had introduced Ingrid to the producer, because he accompanied him on all his trips to Europe and was given the job of seeing that he met what in those days they called young persons ...

Among my notes was another document that I'd thought necessary to Ingrid's biography: a photo of the American producer, discovered by chance during my researches. This photo had been taken during a gala evening in a Florida casino. Some gymnasts were performing on a stage in the middle of the room, and all of a sudden the producer, wanting to impress Ingrid, had got up from the table and taken off his dinner jacket, bow tie and shirt. Stripped to the waist, he had climbed up on to the stage and, in front of the flabbergasted gymnasts, grabbed hold of the trapeze. The photo showed him hanging from the trapeze, his chest thrust out, his stomach held in, his legs at right angles. He was very short, and had

wore a moustache that followed the line of his lip, which reminded me of distant childhood memories. His jaws clenched, his chest triumphant, his legs at right angles ...

This man was trying to prove to a woman who could have been his daughter that you can possess eternal youth. When she told me this anecdote, Ingrid laughed just as hard as I did, until the tears came into her eyes. I wonder whether those tears were not due to the thought of all the time she had wasted in futile evenings like that one.

I tore the photograph of the Avenue des Champs-Élysées and the one of the producer into tiny pieces, which I jumbled up and then scattered in the wastepaper basket. The page on Alexandre d'Albany suffered the same fate; ten years ago his phoney name and the fact that he was a pimp by profession had struck me as so romantic that I had considered the fellow worthy of figuring in a biography of Ingrid. I felt a vague twinge of remorse: has a biographer the right to suppress certain details under the pretext that he considers them superfluous? Or do they all have their importance, and must he present them one after the other, impartially, so that not a single one is left out, as in the inventory of a life of disquiet?

Unless the line of a life, once it has reached its term, purges itself of all its useless and decorative elements. In which case, all that remains is the essential: the blanks, the silences and the pauses. I finally fell asleep, turning all these serious questions over in my mind.

The next morning, in the café on the corner of the square and the Boulevard Soult, a girl and boy who weren't much over twenty were sitting at the table next to mine, and they smiled at me. I felt an urge to talk to them. I thought them well suited to each other; he was dark and she was fair. Perhaps that was how Annette and I had looked at the same age. I found their presence reassuring, and they communicated something of their mysterious power and freshness to me, because I was in good spirits for the rest of the day.

That boy and girl made me reflect on my first meeting with Ingrid and Rigaud on the Saint-Raphaël road. I wondered why they'd stopped their car and invited me to their place so very naturally. It was as if they'd always known me. I'd spent a sleepless night in the train, of course, and my fatigue gave me the impression that everything was possible and that life had lost all its rough edges: all you had to do was let yourself slide down a gentle slope, raise your arm, and a car would stop and people would help you without even asking you any questions. You fell asleep under the pine trees, and when you woke up two pale blue eyes were gazing at you. When I walked down the Rue de la Citadelle arm in arm with Ingrid, it was with the certainty that for the first time in my life I was under someone's protection.

But I hadn't forgotten the way Rigaud limped, as slightly as possible, as if he was trying to hide an injury, or the words Ingrid had whispered in the dark: We'll pretend to be dead. They must already have felt, both of them, that they were coming to the end of the road. At least Ingrid must have. Perhaps my presence had been a distraction for them and a passing comfort. Perhaps, fleetingly, I had conjured up a memory of youth for them. For in fact it was at my age that they had found themselves on the Côte d'Azur. They were very much on their own. And orphans. That must have been why Ingrid had wanted to know whether I had parents.

I DIDN'T NEED to consult my notes that evening in my room in the Dodds Hotel. I remember everything as if it had been yesterday ... They had arrived on the Côte d'Azur in the spring of 1941. She was sixteen, and he was twenty-one. They didn't get off the train at Saint-Raphaël, as I had done, but at Juan-les-Pins. They had come from Paris, and had crossed the demarcation line illegally. Ingrid had a false identity card in the name of Ingrid Teyrsen, married name Rigaud, which aged her by three years. Rigaud had hidden several hundreds of thousands of francs in the linings of his jackets and the bottom of his suit-case.

They were the only passengers at Juan-les-Pins that morning. A cab was waiting outside the station, a black cab with a white horse. They decided to take it, because of their suitcases. The horse started off at a walk, and they crossed the deserted square in the pine forest. The cabdriver's head was leaning over to the right. From behind, it looked as if he had fallen asleep. At the bend in the road leading to the Cape, the sea appeared. The cab turned into a steep alleyway. The driver cracked his whip, and the horse broke into a trot. Then it jerked to a halt outside the enormous white mass of the Hôtel Provençal.

"We must tell them we're on honeymoon," Rigaud had said.

Only one floor of the hotel was still in use, and the rare guests seemed to be living there in hiding. Before reaching it, the lift slowly passed whole floors of shadow and silence, where it would never stop again. Anyone who wanted to use the stairs needed a torch. The big dining room was closed, its chandelier enveloped in a white sheet. The bar wasn't in use, either. So the guests gathered in a corner of the lobby.

Their room was at the back of the hotel and looked out on to a road that sloped gently down to the beach. Their balcony overlooked the pine forest, and they often saw the cab going round the bend in the road to the Cape. In the evenings, the silence was so deep that the clicking sound of the horse's hooves took a very long time to die away. Ingrid and Rigaud played a game to see which of them had such sharp ears as to be the last to hear the horse's hooves.

At Juan-les-Pins, people behaved as if the war didn't exist. The men wore beach trousers and the women light-coloured pareus. All these people were some twenty years older than Ingrid and Rigaud, but this was barely noticeable. Owing to their suntanned skin and their athletic gait, they still looked young and falsely carefree. They didn't know the way things would go when the summer was over. At aperitif time, they exchanged addresses. Would they be able to get rooms in Megève this winter? Some preferred the Val-d'Isère, and were already getting ready to book accommodation at the Col de l'Iseran. Others had no intention of leaving the Côte d'Azur. It was possible that they were going to reopen the Altitude 43 in Saint-Tropez, that white hotel which looks like a liner grounded among the pines above the Plage de la Bouillabaisse. They would be safe there. Fleeting signs of anguish could be read on their faces under the suntan: to think that they were going to have to be permanently on the move, searching for a place that the war had spared, and that these oases were going to become rare all the time ... Rationing was beginning on the Côte. You mustn't think about anything, so as not to undermine your morale. These idle days sometimes gave you the feeling of being under house arrest. You had to create a vacuum in your head. Let yourself be gently numbed by the sun and the swaying of the palm trees in the breeze ... Shut your eyes. Ingrid and Rigaud lived the same sort of life as the people who were forgetting the war, but they kept out of their way and avoided speaking to them. At first, everyone had been astonished by their youth. Were they waiting for their parents? Were they on holiday? Rigaud had replied that Ingrid and he "were on honeymoon", quite simply. And this reply, for

from surprising them, had reassured the guests at the Provençal. If young people still went on honeymoon, it meant that the situation wasn't so tragic as all that and that the earth was still going round.

In the mornings they went down to the beach which stretched below the pine forest between the Casino and the beginning of the road to the Cape. The hotel's private beach, with its pergola and its bathing huts wasn't functioning now "as it did in peacetime", as the hall porter put it. A few deck chairs and sunshades were still at the guests' disposal. But they weren't allowed to use the bathing huts until the end of the war. Newcomers wondered whether they weren't committing an offence when they used this beach. They were even a little ashamed of sunbathing. In the first days, Rigaud had tried to reassure Ingrid, who was always afraid that someone would come and ask them what they were doing there, because she was still suffering from the after-effects of the precarious life she had lived in Paris. He had bought her a pale green swimming costume in a boutique in Juan-les-Pins. And also a pareu, with pastel-coloured printed designs, like the other women wore. They would lie on a pontoon and as soon as the sun had dried their skin they dived into the sea again. They would swim out, and then return to the beach side by side, swimming on their backs. At the beginning of the afternoon when the sun was too hot, they would cross the deserted road and walk up the path lined with pine trees and palm trees that led to the entrance to the Provençal. Often, the hall porter was not at the reception desk. But Rigaud kept their key in his bath-robe pocket. Then there would be the slow ascent in the lift, the dark landings going by, leaving them to imagine the silent, interminable corridors, the rooms which probably contained no more than their bed-frames. As the lift rose, the air became lighter, and they were enveloped in the coolness of the half light. On the fifth floor, the big wrought-iron gate would bang behind them, and then nothing else would break the silence.

From their balcony they gazed down at the pine forest, and under its dark-green fringe they could make out the white patch of the casino. And along the wall round the hotel, the steep street where nobody went by. Then they closed their shutters—pale-green shutters, the same colour as Ingrid's swimming costume.

In the evenings, they would cross the square in the pine forest and go and have dinner at the only restaurant in Juan-les-Pins that ignored the restrictions. Customers came there from Nice and Cannes. At the beginning, Ingrid felt ill at ease there.

The habitués greeted each other from table to table, the men tied their sweaters casually over their shoulders, the women showed their tanned backs and swathed their hair in Creole foulards. You could overhear conversations in English. The war was so far away ... The restaurant was in a wing of the building near the casino and its tables spilled over on to the pavement. It was said that the *patronne*—a certain Mademoiselle Cotillon—had had a brush with the law, but that these days she enjoyed "protection". She was very pleasant, and in Juan-les-Pins she was known as the Princesse de Bourbon.

They went back to the hotel, and on moonless nights a feeling of anxiety descended on them both. Not a single street lamp, not a single lighted window. The Princess de Bourbon's restaurant was still aglow, as if she was the last to dare to defy the curfew. But after a few steps this light disappeared, and they were walking in the dark. The murmur of conversation faded, too. All those people whose presence at the tables reassured them, and whom they saw on the beach during the day, now seemed unreal: walkers-on from a touring company who had got stuck in Juan-les-Pins because of the war and were compelled to play their parts of phoney holidaymakers on the beach and in the restaurant run by a phoney Princesse de Bourbon. The Provençal itself, whose white mass could just be made out in the

shadows in the background, was a gigantic pasteboard set.

~~And every time they crossed this dark pine forest, Ingrid was suddenly shaken by sobs.~~

But they went into the lobby. The glittering light of the chandelier made them blink. The porter was standing behind the reception desk in his uniform. He smiled, and gave them the key to their room. Things regained a little consistence and reality. They found themselves in a real hotel lobby with real walls and a real uniformed porter. Then they went up in the lift. And once again they became a prey to doubt and anxiety when they pressed the button for the fifth floor, as all the buttons for the other floors were covered with sticky tape to make it quite clear that they were not in use.

At the end of their long ascent in the dark, they came to a landing and a corridor faintly lit by naked bulbs. That was the way it was. They went from light to shade and from shade to light. They had to get used to this world in which everything could fluctuate from one moment to the next.

In the mornings, when they opened the shutters, a harsh light flooded into the room. It was exactly like the summers of the past. The dark green of the pines, the blue sky, the scent of eucalyptus and oleanders from the Avenue Saramartel which goes down to the beach ... In the heat haze, the Provençal's great white façade soared upwards for all eternity and you had the impression that the monument protected you, if you gazed at it from the pontoon, lying there after your swim.

Just one very small detail was enough to blot this landscape: a dark patch Rigaud had noticed for the first time, late one afternoon, on a bench in one of the paths in the pine forest. Ingrid and he were coming back from a walk on the boulevard along the coast. A man in a city suit was sitting on the bench, reading a newspaper. And in contrast to the dark colour of his suit, his complexion was milk white, like that of someone who never exposes himself to the sun.

The next morning they were both lying on the pontoon. And Rigaud again noticed this dark patch leaning on the balustrade of the terrace, to the left of the steps leading down to the beach. The man was watching the few people who were sunbathing. Rigaud was the only one who saw him, as the others had their backs to him. For a moment he had wanted to point him out to Ingrid, but he changed his mind. He got her into the sea, they swam even farther out than usual, and then returned to the pontoon, swimming on their backs. Ingrid preferred to stay on the beach, as the pontoon was scorching. Rigaud had gone to fetch her a deck chair from the veranda outside the bathing huts. He went back to Ingrid, who was standing at the edge of the water in her pale-green swimming costume and looked up towards the balustrade. This time the man seemed to be spying on Ingrid, smoking a cigarette which remained glued to his lips. His face was still as milk white, in spite of the sun. And his suit appeared even darker in contrast with the white veranda and beach huts. Rigaud had spotted him once again at aperitif time, sitting at the far end of the lobby, staring at the guests coming out of the lift.

So far, he hadn't been able to see his features very clearly. But that same evening, in the Princesse de Bourbon's restaurant, he was able to do so at leisure. The man was sitting at a table near theirs, at the back of the room. A bony face. Blond hair with reddish glints, combed back. His milk-white skin seemed to be pitted over his cheekbones. He was wearing his city suit and casting a beady eye over the tables where the habitués were sitting. It was almost as if he wanted to take a census of them. Finally his gaze came to rest on Ingrid and Rigaud.

"Are you on holiday?"



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