

Albert Camus

Translated from the French by Richard Howard

Afterword and Notes by Jean Sarracini

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The publication of the *Cahiers Albert Camus* has been decided upon by the writer's family and publishers, in answer to the wishes of many scholars and, more generally, of all those interested in his life and thought.

It is not without some scruple that this publication has been undertaken. A severe critic of his own work, Albert Camus published nothing heedlessly. Why, then, offer the public an abandoned novel, lectures, uncollected articles, notebooks, drafts?

Simply because, when we love a writer or study him closely, we often want to know everything he has written. Those responsible for Camus' unpublished writings consider it would be a mistake not to respond to these legitimate wishes and not to satisfy those who desire to read *A Happy Death*, for example, or the travel diaries.

Scholars whose research has led them—on occasion during Camus' lifetime—to consult his youthful writings or later texts which remain unfamiliar or even unpublished, believe that the writer's image can only be clarified and enriched by making them accessible.

The publication of the *Cahiers Albert Camus* is under the editorship of Jean-Claude Brisville, Roger Grenier, Roger Quilliot and Paul Viallaneix.

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Part One

Natural Death

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It was ten in the morning, and Patrice Mersault was walking steadily toward Zagreus' villa. By now the housekeeper had left for the market, and the villa was deserted. It was a beautiful April morning, chilly and bright; the sky was radiant, but there was no warmth in the glistening sunshine. The empty road sloped up toward the villa, and a pure light streamed between the pines covering the hillside. Patrice Mersault was carrying a suitcase, and as he walked on through that primal morning, the only sounds he heard were the click of his own footsteps on the cold road and the regular creak of the suitcase handle.

Not far from the villa, the road crossed a little square decorated with flowerbeds and benches. The effect of the early red geraniums among gray aloes, the blue sky, and the whitewashed walls was so fresh, so childlike that Mersault stopped a moment before walking on through the square. Then the road sloped down again toward Zagreus' villa. On the doorstep he paused and put on his gloves. He opened the door which the cripple never locked and carefully closed it behind him. He walked down the hall to the third door on the left, knocked and went in. Zagreus was there, of course, a blanket over the stumps of his legs, sitting in an armchair by the fire exactly where Mersault had sat two days ago. He

was reading, and his book lay open on the blanket; there was no surprise in his round eyes as he stared up at Mersault, who was standing in front of the closed door. The curtains were drawn back, and patches of sunshine lay on the floor, the furniture, making objects glitter in the room. Beyond the window, the morning rejoiced over the cold, golden earth. A great icy joy, the birds' shrill, tentative outcry, the flood of pitiless light gave the day an aspect of innocence and truth. Mersault stood motionless, the room's stifling heat filling his throat, his ears. Despite the change in the weather, there was a blazing fire in the grate. And Mersault felt his blood rising to his temples, pounding at the tips of his ears. Zagreus' eyes followed his movements, though he did not say a word. Patrice walked toward the chest on the other side of the fireplace and put his suitcase down on a table without looking at the cripple. He felt a faint tremor in his ankles now. He took out a cigarette and lit it—clumsily, for he was wearing gloves. A faint noise behind him made him turn around, the cigarette between his lips. Zagreus was still staring at him, but had just closed the book. Mersault—the fire was painfully hot against his knees now—could read the title upside down: *The Courtier* by Baltasar Gracian. Then he bent over the chest and opened it. The revolver was still there, its lustrous black, almost feline curves on the white letter. Mersault picked up the envelope with his left hand and the revolver with his right. After an in-

stant's hesitation, he thrust the gun under his left arm and opened the envelope. It contained one large sheet of paper, with only a few lines of Za-greus' tall, angular handwriting across the top:

"I am doing away with only half a man. It need cause no problem—there is more than enough here to pay off those who have taken care of me till now. Please use what is left over to improve conditions of the men in death row. But I know it's asking a lot."

Expressionless, Mersault folded the sheet and put it back in the envelope. As he did so the smoke from his cigarette stung his eyes, and a tiny chunk of ash fell on the envelope. He shook it off, set the envelope

on the table where it was sure to be noticed, and turned toward Zagreus, who was staring at the envelope now, his stubby powerful fingers still holding the book. Mersault bent down, turned the key of the little strongbox inside the chest, and took out the packets of bills, only their ends visible in the newspaper wrappings. Holding the gun under one arm, with the other hand he methodically filled up the suitcase. There were fewer than twenty packets of hundreds, and Mersault realized he had brought too large a suitcase. He left one packet in the safe. Then he closed the suitcase, flicked the half-smoked cigarette into the fire and, taking the revolver in his right hand, walked toward the cripple.

Zagreus was staring at the window now. A car drove slowly past, making a faint chewing sound. Motionless, Zagreus seemed to be contemplating all

the inhuman beauty of this April morning. When he felt the barrel against his right temple, he did not turn away. But Patrice, watching him, saw his eyes fill with tears. It was Patrice who closed his eyes, He stepped back and fired. Leaning against the wall for a moment, his eyes still closed, he felt his blood throbbing in his ears. Then he opened his eyes. The head had fallen over onto the left shoulder, the body only slightly tilted. But it was no longer Zagreus he saw now, only a huge, bulging wound of brain, blood, and bone. Mersault began to tremble. He walked around to the other side of the armchair, groped for Zagreus' right hand, thrust the revolver into it, raised it to the temple, and let it fall back. The revolver dropped onto the arm of the chair and then into Zagreus' lap. Now Mersault noticed the cripple's mouth and chin—he had the same serious and sad expression as when he was staring at the window. Just then a shrill horn sounded in front of the door. A second time. Mersault, still leaning over the armchair, did not move. The sound of tires meant that the butcher had driven away. Mersault picked up his suitcase, turned the doorknob gleaming suddenly in a sunbeam, and left the room, his head throbbing, his mouth parched. He opened the outer door and walked away quickly. There was no one in sight except a group of children at one end of the little square. He walked on. Past the square, he was suddenly aware of the cold, and shivered under his light jacket. He sneezed twice, and the valley

filled with shrill mocking echoes that the crystal sky carried higher and higher. Staggering slightly, he stopped and took a deep breath. Millions of tiny white smiles thronged down from the blue sky. They played over the leaves still cupping the rain, over the damp earth of the paths, soared to the blood-red tile roofs, then back into the lakes of air and light from which they had just overflowed. A tiny plane hummed its way across the sky. In this flowering of air, this fertility of the heavens, it seemed as if a man's one duty was to live and be happy. Everything in Mersault fell silent. He sneezed a third time, and shivered feverishly. Then he hurried away without glancing around him, the suitcase creaking, his footsteps loud on the road. Once he was back in his room, and had put the suitcase in a corner, he lay down on his bed and slept until the middle of the afternoon.

2

Summer crammed the harbor with noise and sunlight. It was eleven thirty. The day split open down the middle, crushing the docks under the burden of its heat. Moored at the sheds of the Algiers Municipal Depot, black-hulled, red-chimneyed freighters were loading sacks of wheat. Their dusty fragrance mingled with the powerful smell of tar melting under a hot sun. Men were drinking at a little stall that reeked of creosote and anisette, while some Arab acrobats in red shirts somersaulted on the scorching flagstones in front of the sea in the leaping light. Without so much as a glance at them, the stevedores carrying the sacks walked up the two sagging planks that slanted from the dock to the freighter decks. When they reached the top, their silhouettes were suddenly divided between the sea and the sky among the winches and masts. They stopped for an instant, dazzled by the light, eyes gleaming in the whitish crust of dust and sweat that covered their faces, before they plunged blindly into the hold stinking of hot blood. In the fiery air, a siren blew without stopping.

Suddenly the men on the plank stopped in confusion. One of them had fallen, and was caught between the planks, his arm pinned under his body, crushed under the tremendous weight of the sack, and he screamed with pain. Just at this moment, Pa-

trice Mersault emerged from his office, and on the doorstep, the summer heat took his breath away. He opened his mouth, inhaled the tar vapors, which stung his throat, and then he went over to the stevedores. They had moved the man who had been hurt, and he was lying in the dust, his lips white with pain, his arm dangling, broken above the elbow. A sliver of bone had pierced the flesh, making an ugly wound from which blood was dripping. The drops rolled down his arm and fell, one by one, onto the scorching stones with a tiny hiss, and turned to steam. Mersault was staring, motionless, at the blood when someone took his arm. It was Emmanuel, one of the clerks. He pointed to a truck heading toward them with a salvo of backfires. "That one?" Patrice began to run as the truck drove past them, chains rattling. They dashed after it, swallowed up by dust and noise, panting and blind, just conscious enough to feel themselves swept on by the frenzied effort of running, in a wild rhythm of winches and machines, accompanied by the dancing masts on the horizon and the pitching of the leprous hulls they passed. Mersault was the first to grab hold, confident of his strength and skill, and he jumped onto the moving truck. He helped Emmanuel up, and the two men sat with their legs dangling in the chalk-white dust, while a luminous suffocation poured out of the sky over the circle of the harbor crowded with masts and black cranes, the uneven cobbles of the dock jarring Emmanuel and Mersault as the truck

gained speed, making them laugh until they were breathless, dizzy by the jolting movement, the searing sky, their own boiling blood.

When they reached Belcourt, Mersault slid off with Emmanuel, who was singing now, loud and out of tune. "You know," he told Mersault, "it comes up in your chest. It comes when you feel good. When you're in the water." It was true: Emmanuel sang when he swam, and his voice, hoarse from shouting, inaudible against the sea, marked time for the gestures of his short, muscular arms. They were walking down the rue de Lyon, Mersault tall beside Emmanuel, his broad shoulders rolling. In the way he stepped onto the curb, the way he twisted his hips to avoid the crowd that occasionally closed in on him, his body seemed curiously young and vigorous, capable of bearing him to any extreme of physical joy. Relaxed, he rested his weight on one hip with a self-conscious litheness, like a man whose body has acquired its style from sports. His eyes sparkled under the heavy brows, and as he talked to Emmanuel he would tug at his collar with a mechanical gesture to free his neck muscles, tensing his curved mobile lips at the same time. They walked into their restaurant, sat down at a table, and ate in silence. It was cool inside, among the flies, the clatter of plates, the hum of conversation. The owner, Celeste, a tall man with huge mustaches, walked over to greet them, scratching his belly under his apron. "Pretty good," Celeste answered them, "good for an

old man." Celeste and Emmanuel exchanged exclamations and thumped each other on the shoulder. "Old men," Celeste said, "you know what old men are, they're all the same. Shitheads. They tell you a real man's got to be fifty. But that's because *they're* fifty. I knew this one guy who could have his good times just with his son. They'd go out together. On the town. They'd go to the Casino, and this guy would say: 'Why should I hang around with a lot of old men! Every day they tell me they've taken some medicine, there's always something wrong with their liver. I have a better time with my son. Sometimes he picks up a whore, I look the other way, I take the streetcar. So long and thanks. Fine with me.'" Emmanuel laughed. "Of course," Celeste said, "the guy was no authority, but I liked him all right." He turned to Mersault. "Anyway, it's better than this other guy I knew. When he made his money, he would talk with his head way up making gestures all the time. Now he's not so proud of himself—he's lost it all."

"Serves him right," Mersault said.

"Oh, you can't be a bastard in life. This guy took it while he had it, and he was right. Almost a million francs he had . . . Now if it had been me!"

"What would you do?" Emmanuel asked.

"I'd buy myself a cabin on the beach, I'd put some glue in my navel, and I'd stick a flag in there. Then I'd wait to see which way the wind was blowing."

Mersault ate quietly until Emmanuel started to tell Celeste how he had fought the battle of the Marne. "See, they sent us Zouaves out in front . . ."

"Cut the bullshit," Mersault said calmly.

"The major said, 'Charge!' and we ran down into a kind of gully, only with trees in it. He told us to charge, but no one was there. So we just marched right on, kept on walking. And then all of a sudden these machineguns are firing right into us. We all fall on top of each other. There were so many dead and wounded that you could have rowed a boat across the blood in that gully. Some of them kept screaming, 'Mama!' Christ, it was awful."

Mersault stood up and tied a knot in his napkin. The owner walked over to the kitchen door and chalked the price of his dinner on it. When one of his customers hadn't paid up, Celeste would take the door off its hinges and bring the evidence on his back. Rene, his son, was eating a boiled egg over in a corner. "Poor kid," Emmanuel said, thumping his own chest, "he's had it." It was true. Rene was usually quiet and serious. Though he was not particularly thin, his eyes glittered. Just now another customer was explaining to him that "with time and patience, TB can be cured." Rene nodded and answered solemnly between bites. Mersault walked over to the counter and ordered coffee, leaning on his elbows. The other customer went on: "Did you ever know Jean Perez? He worked for the gas company. He's dead now. He had this one bad lung. But

he wanted to get out of the hospital and go home. His wife was there, see. She was nothing but his horse. You know, his sickness made him like that—he was always on top of her. She wouldn't want it, but he had to. So two, three times, every day of the week—it ends up killing a sick man." Rene stopped eating, a piece a bread between his teeth, and stared at the man. "Yes," he said finally, "the thing comes on fast, but it takes time to get rid of it." Mersault wrote his name with one finger on the steamed-over percolator. He blinked his eyes. Every day his life alternated between this calm consumptive and Emmanuel bursting into song, between the smell of coffee and the smell of tar, alienated from himself and his interests, from his heart, his truth. Things that in other circumstances would have excited him left him unmoved now, for they were simply part of his life, until the moment he was back in his room using all his strength and care to smother the flame of life that burned within him.

"What do you think, Mersault? You've been to school," Celeste said.

"Oh, cut it out," Patrice said, "you'll get over it."

"You're touchy this morning."

Mersault smiled and, leaving the restaurant, crossed the street and went upstairs to his room. The apartment was over a horse butcher's. Leaning over his balcony, he could smell blood as he read the sign: "To Man's Noblest Conquest." He stretched out on his bed, smoked a cigarette, and fell asleep.

He slept in what used to be his mother's room. They had had this little three-room apartment a long time. Now that he was alone, Mersault rented two rooms to a man he knew, a barrelmaker who lived with his sister, and he had kept the best room for himself. His mother had been fifty-six when she died. A beautiful woman, she had enjoyed—and expected to enjoy—a life of diversion, a life of pleasure. At forty, she had been stricken by a terrible disease. She had had to give up her clothes, her cosmetics, and was reduced to hospital gowns, her face deformed by terrible swellings; her swollen legs and her weakness kept her almost immobilized, and she would grope frantically around the colorless apartment she could no longer take care of, for she was half blind as well. The diabetes she had neglected had been further aggravated by her careless life. Mersault had had to abandon his studies and take a job. Until his mother's death, he had continued to read, to reflect. And for ten years, the sick woman endured that life. The suffering had lasted so long that those around her grew accustomed to her disease and forgot that she was deathly ill, that she would die. One day she died. People in the neighborhood felt sorry for Mersault.

They expected a lot from the funeral. They recalled the son's deep feeling for his mother. They warned distant relatives not to mourn too much, so that Patrice would not feel his own grief too intensely. They were asked to protect him, to take care of him. But Patrice, dressed in his best and with his hat in his hand,

watched the arrangements. He walked in the procession, listened to the service, tossed his handful of earth, and folded his hands. Only once did he look surprised, expressing his regret that there were so few cars for those who had attended the service. That was all. The next day, a sign appeared in one of the apartment windows: "For rent." Now he lived in his mother's room. In the past, the poverty they shared had a certain sweetness about it: when the end of the day came and they would eat their dinner in silence with the oil lamp between them, there was a secret joy in such simplicity, such retrenchment. The neighborhood was a quiet one. Mersault would stare at his mother's slack mouth and smile. She would smile back. He would start eating again. The lamp would smoke a little. His mother tended it with the same exhausted gesture, extending only her right arm, her body slumped down in her chair. "You're not hungry any more?" she would ask, a moment later. "No." He would smoke, or read. If he smoked, she always said: "Again!" If he read: "Sit closer to the lamp you'll ruin your eyes." But now the poverty in solitude was misery. And when Mersault thought sadly of the dead woman, his pity was actually for himself. He could have found a more comfortable room, but he clung to this apartment and its smell of poverty. Here, at least, he maintained contact with what he had been, and in a life where he deliberately tried to expunge himself, this patient, sordid confrontation helped him to survive his hours of melancholy and

regret. He had left on the door the frayed gray card on which his mother had written her name in blue pencil. He had kept the old brass bed with its sateen spread, and the portrait of his grandfather with his tiny beard and pale, motionless eyes. On the mantelpiece, shepherds and shepherdesses framed an old clock that had stopped and an oil lamp he almost never lit. The dreary furnishings—some rickety rattan chairs, the wardrobe with its yellowed mirror, a dressing table missing one corner—did not exist for him: habit had blurred everything. He moved through the ghost of an apartment that required no effort of him. In another room, he would have had to grow accustomed to novelty, to struggle once again. He wanted to diminish the surface he offered the world, to sleep until everything was consumed. For this purpose, the old room served him well. One window overlooked the street, the other a yard always full of laundry, and, beyond it, a few clumps of orange trees squeezed between high walls. Sometimes, on summer nights, he left the room dark and opened the window overlooking the yard and the dim trees. Out of the darkness the fragrance of orange blossoms rose into the darkness, strong and sweet, surrounding him with its delicate shawls. All night during the summer, he and his room were enclosed in that dense yet subtle perfume and it was as if, dead for days at a time, he had opened his window on life for the first time.

He wakened, his mouth full of sleep, his body

covered with sweat. It was very late. He combed his hair, ran downstairs, and jumped onto a streetcar. By five past two he was in his office. He worked in a big room where the walls were covered with 414 pigeonholes into which folders were piled. The room was neither dirty nor sordid, but it suggested, at any hour of the day, a catacomb in which dead hours had putrefied. Mersault checked shipping bills, translated provision lists from English ships, and between three and four dealt with clients who wanted crates or luggage shipped. He had asked for this work, which really wasn't a part of his job. But at the start, he had found it a way of escaping into life. There were living faces, familiar encounters, and a passing breath of life in which at least he felt his own heart beating. And it allowed him to avoid the faces of the three secretaries and the supervisor, Monsieur Langlois. One of the secretaries was quite pretty and had been recently married. Another lived with her mother, and the third was a dignified and energetic old lady whom Mersault liked for her florid way of talking and her reticence about what Langlois called her "misfortunes." The supervisor would engage in peremptory arguments with old Madame Herbillon, who always emerged victorious. She despised Langlois for the sweat that pasted his trousers to his buttocks when he stood up and for the panic which seized him in the presence of the head of the firm and occasionally on the phone when he heard the name of some lawyer or even

some idiot with a *de* in front of his name. The poor man was quite unable to soften the old lady's heart or to win his way into her good graces. This afternoon he was strutting around the middle of the office. "We really get along very well together, don't we, Madame Herbillon?" Mersault was translating "vegetables," staring over his head at the lightbulb in its corrugated green cardboard shade. Across from him was a bright-colored calendar showing a religious procession in Newfoundland. Sponge, blotter, inkwell, and ruler were lined up on his desk. The windows near him looked out over huge piles of wood brought from Norway by yellow and white freighters. Mersault listened. On the other side of the wall, life had its own deep, muffled rhythm, a respiration that filled the harbor and the sea. So remote, and yet so close to him . . . The six o'clock bell released him. It was a Saturday.

Once home, he lay down on his bed and slept till dinnertime. He made himself some eggs and ate them out of the pan (with no bread; he had forgotten to buy any), then stretched out again and fell asleep at once. He awoke the next morning just before lunchtime, washed and went downstairs to eat. Back in his room he did two crossword puzzles, carefully cut out an advertisement for Kruschen Salts which he pasted into a booklet already filled with jovial grandfathers sliding down banisters. Then he washed his hands and went out onto his balcony. It was a beautiful afternoon. Yet the side-

walks were damp, the occasional passer-by in a hurry. Mersault stared after each one until he was out of sight, then attached his gaze to a new arrival within his field of vision. First came families walking together—two little boys in sailor suits, uncomfortable in their starched blouses, and a girl with a huge pink bow and black patent-leather shoes. Behind them a mother in a brown silk dress, a monstrous creature swathed in a boa, the father, more elegant, carrying a cane. In a little while it was the turn of the young men of the neighborhood, hair slicked back and red neckties, close-fitting jackets with embroidered pocket handkerchiefs, and square-toed shoes. They were on their way to the movies in the center of town, and hurried toward the streetcar, laughing very loud. Then the street grew still again. The afternoon diversions had begun. The neighborhood belonged to cats and shopkeepers. The sky, though clear, was lusterless over the ficus trees lining the road. Across from Mersault, the tobacconist brought a chair out in front of his door and straddled it, leaning his arms on the back. The streetcars that had been crowded a little while ago were almost empty. In the little cafe Chez Pierrot, the waiter was sweeping sawdust in the empty front room. Mersault turned his chair around, placed it like the tobacconist's, and smoked two cigarettes one after the other. He went back into his room, broke off a piece of chocolate, and returned to his balcony to eat it. Soon the sky dark-

ened, then paled again. But the passing clouds had left a promise of rain over the street they dimmed. At five, streetcars groaned past, jammed with soccer fans from the outlying stadiums perched on the runningboards and hanging from the handrails. On the next streetcar, he could identify the players themselves by their canvas bags. They shouted and sang at the top of their lungs that their teams would never die. Several waved to Mersault. One shouted: "We did it this time!" "Yes," was all Mersault answered, nodding. Then there were more cars. Some had flowers wreathed in their bumpers and looped around their fins. Then the light faded a little more. Over the roofs the sky reddened, and with evening the streets grew lively again. The strollers returned, the tired children whining as they let themselves be dragged home. The neighborhood movie houses disgorged a crowd into the street. Mersault could tell from the violent gestures of the young men that they had seen some sort of adventure film. Those who had been to movies in the center of town appeared a little later. They were more serious: for all their laughter and teasing gestures, their eyes and their movements betrayed a kind of nostalgia for the magical lives they had just shared. They lingered in the street, coming and going. And on the sidewalk across from Mersault, two streams finally formed. One consisted of neighborhood girls, walking arm in arm, bareheaded. The young men in the other cracked jokes which made the girls laugh and look

away. Older people went into the cafes or formed groups on the sidewalk which the human river flowed around as if they were islands. The street-lamps were on now, and the electric light made the first stars look faint in the night sky. An audience of one, Mersault watched the procession of people under the lights. The streetlamps made the damp sidewalks gleam, and at regular intervals the streetcars would throw reflections on shiny hair, wet lips, a smile, or a silver bracelet. Gradually the streetcars became