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I worked hard at the office today. The boss was nice. He asked me if I wasn't too tired and he also wanted to know Maman's age. I said, "About sixty," so as not to make a mistake; and I don't know why, but he seemed to be relieved somehow and to consider the matter closed.

There was a stack of freight invoices that had piled up on my desk, and I had to go through them all. Before leaving the office to go to lunch, I washed my hands. I really like doing this at lunchtime. I don't enjoy it so much in the evening, because the roller towel you use is soaked through: one towel has to last all day. I mentioned it once to my boss. He told me he was sorry but it was really a minor detail. I left a little late, at half past twelve, with Emmanuel, who works as a dispatcher. The office overlooks the sea, and we took a minute to watch the freighters in the harbor, which was ablaze with sunlight. Then a truck came toward us with its chains rattling and its engine backfiring. Emmanuel said, "How 'bout it?" and I started running. The truck passed us and we ran after it. I was engulfed by the noise and the dust.

I couldn't see anything, and all I was conscious of was the sensation of hurtling forward in a mad dash through cranes and winches, masts bobbing on the horizon and the hulls of ships alongside us as we ran. I was first to grab hold and take a flying leap. Then I reached out and helped Emmanuel scramble up. We were out of breath; the truck was bumping around on the uneven cobblestones of the quay in a cloud of dust and sun. Emmanuel was laughing so hard he could hardly breathe.

We arrived at Céleste's dripping with sweat. Céleste was there, as always, with his big belly, his apron, and his white moustache. He asked me if things were "all right now." I told him yes they were and said I was hungry. I ate fast and had some coffee. Then I went home and slept for a while because I'd drunk too much wine, and when I woke up I felt like having a smoke. It was late and I ran to catch a streetcar. I worked all afternoon. It got very hot in the office, and that evening, when I left, I was glad to walk back slowly along the docks. The sky was green; I felt good. But I went straight home because I wanted to boil myself some potatoes.

On my way upstairs, in the dark, I ran into old Salamano, my neighbor across the landing. He was with his dog. The two of them have been inseparable for eight years. The spaniel has a skin disease—mange, I think—which makes almost all its hair fall out and leaves it covered with brown sores and scabs. After living together for so long, the two of them alone in one tiny room, they've ended up looking like each other. Old

Salamano has reddish scabs on his face and wispy yellow hair. As for the dog, he's sort of taken on his master's stooped look, muzzle down, neck straining. They look as if they belong to the same species, and yet they hate each other. Twice a day, at eleven and six, the old man takes the dog out for a walk. They haven't changed their route in eight years. You can see them in the rue de Lyon, the dog pulling the man along until old Salamano stumbles. Then he beats the dog and swears at it. The dog cowers and trails behind. Then it's the old man who pulls the dog. Once the dog has forgotten, it starts dragging its master along again, and again gets beaten and sworn at. Then they both stand there on the sidewalk and stare at each other, the dog in terror, the man in hatred. It's the same thing every day. When the dog wants to urinate, the old man won't give him enough time and yanks at him, so that the spaniel leaves behind a trail of little drops. If the dog has an accident in the room, it gets beaten again. This has been going on for eight years. Céleste is always saying, "It's pitiful," but really, who's to say? When I ran into him on the stairs, Salamano was swearing away at the dog. He was saying, "Filthy, stinking bastard!" and the dog was whimpering. I said "Good evening," but the old man just went on cursing. So I asked him what the dog had done. He didn't answer. All he said was "Filthy, stinking bastard!" I could barely see him leaning over his dog, trying to fix something on its collar. I spoke louder. Then, without turning around, he answered with a kind of suppressed rage, "He's always

there." Then he left, yanking at the animal, which was letting itself be dragged along, whimpering.

Just then my other neighbor came in. The word around the neighborhood is that he lives off women. But when you ask him what he does, he's a "warehouse guard." Generally speaking, he's not very popular. But he often talks to me and sometimes stops by my place for a minute, because I listen to him. I find what he has to say interesting. Besides, I don't have any reason not to talk to him. His name is Raymond Sintès. He's a little on the short side, with broad shoulders and a nose like a boxer's. He always dresses very sharp. And once he said to me, talking about Salamano, "If that isn't pitiful!" He asked me didn't I think it was disgusting and I said no.

We went upstairs and I was about to leave him when he said, "I've got some blood sausage and some wine at my place. How about joining me?" I figured it would save me the trouble of having to cook for myself, so I accepted. He has only one room too, and a little kitchen with no window. Over his bed he has a pink-and-white plaster angel, some pictures of famous athletes, and two or three photographs of naked women. The room was dirty and the bed was unmade. First he lit his paraffin lamp, then he took a pretty dubious-looking bandage out of his pocket and wrapped it around his right hand. I asked him what he'd done to it. He said he'd been in a fight with some guy who was trying to start trouble.

"You see, Monsieur Meursault," he said, "it's not that I'm a bad guy, but I have a short fuse. This guy says to me, 'If you're man enough you'll get down off that streetcar.' I said, 'C'mon, take it easy.' Then he said, 'You're yellow.' So I got off and I said to him, 'I think you better stop right there or I'm gonna have to teach you a lesson.' And he said, 'You and who else?' So I let him have it. He went down. I was about to help him up but he started kicking me from there on the ground. So I kneed him one and slugged him a couple of times. His face was all bloody. I asked him if he'd had enough. He said, 'Yes.' " All this time, Sintès was fiddling with his bandage. I was sitting on the bed. He said, "So you see, I wasn't the one who started it. He was asking for it." It was true and I agreed. Then he told me that as a matter of fact he wanted to ask my advice about the whole business, because I was a man, I knew about things, I could help him out, and then we'd be pals. I didn't say anything, and he asked me again if I wanted to be pals. I said it was fine with me: he seemed pleased. He got out the blood sausage, fried it up, and set out glasses, plates, knives and forks, and two bottles of wine. All this in silence. Then we sat down. As we ate, he started telling me his story. He was a little hesitant at first. "I knew this lady . . . as a matter of fact, well, she was my mistress." The man he'd had the fight with was this woman's brother. He told me he'd been keeping her. I didn't say anything, and yet right away he added that he knew what people around the neighborhood

were saying, but that his conscience was clear and that he was a warehouse guard.

"To get back to what I was saying," he continued, "I realized that she was cheating on me." He'd been giving her just enough to live on. He paid the rent on her room and gave her twenty francs a day for food. "Three hundred francs for the room, six hundred for food, a pair of stockings every now and then—that made it a thousand francs. And Her Highness refused to work. But she was always telling me that things were too tight, that she couldn't get by on what I was giving her. And I'd say to her, 'Why not work half-days? You'd be helping me out on all the little extras. I bought you a new outfit just this month, I give you twenty francs a day, I pay your rent, and what do you do? . . . You have coffee in the afternoons with your friends. You even provide the coffee and sugar. And me, I provide the money. I've been good to you, and this is how you repay me.' But she wouldn't work; she just kept on telling me she couldn't make ends meet—and that's what made me realize she was cheating on me."

Then he told me that he'd found a lottery ticket in her purse and she hadn't been able to explain how she paid for it. A short time later he'd found a ticket from the shop in Mont-de-Piété in her room which proved that she'd pawned two bracelets. Until then he hadn't even known the bracelets existed. "It was clear that she was cheating on me. So I left her. But first I smacked her around. And then I told her exactly what I thought of

her. I told her that all she was interested in was getting into the sack. You see, Monsieur Meursault, it's like I told her: 'You don't realize that everybody's jealous of how good you have it with me. Someday you'll know just how good it was.' "

He'd beaten her till she bled. He'd never beaten her before. "I'd smack her around a little, but nice-like, you might say. She'd scream a little. I'd close the shutters and it always ended the same way. But this time it's for real. And if you ask me, she still hasn't gotten what she has coming."

Then he explained that that was what he needed advice about. He stopped to adjust the lamp's wick, which was smoking. I just listened. I'd drunk close to a liter of wine and my temples were burning. I was smoking Raymond's cigarettes because I'd run out. The last streetcars were going by, taking the now distant sounds of the neighborhood with them. Raymond went on. What bothered him was that he "still had sexual feelings for her." But he wanted to punish her. First he'd thought of taking her to a hotel and calling the vice squad to cause a scandal and have her listed as a common prostitute. After that he'd looked up some of his underworld friends. But they didn't come up with anything. As Raymond pointed out to me, a lot of good it does being in the underworld. He'd said the same thing to them, and then they'd suggested "marking" her. But that wasn't what he wanted. He was going to think about it. But first he wanted to ask me something. Be-

fore he did, though, he wanted to know what I thought of the whole thing. I said I didn't think anything but that it was interesting. He asked if I thought she was cheating on him, and it seemed to me she was; if I thought she should be punished and what I would do in his place, and I said you can't ever be sure, but I understood his wanting to punish her. I drank a little more wine. He lit a cigarette and let me in on what he was thinking about doing. He wanted to write her a letter, "one with a punch and also some things in it to make her sorry for what she's done." Then, when she came running back, he'd go to bed with her and "right at the last minute" he'd spit in her face and throw her out. Yes, that would punish her, I thought. But Raymond told me he didn't think he could write the kind of letter it would take and that he'd thought of asking me to write it for him. Since I didn't say anything, he asked if I'd mind doing it right then and I said no.

He downed a glass of wine and then stood up. He pushed aside the plates and the little bit of cold sausage we'd left. He carefully wiped the oilcloth covering the table. Then from a drawer in his night table he took out a sheet of paper, a yellow envelope, a small red pen box, and a square bottle with purple ink in it. When he told me the woman's name I realized she was Moorish. I wrote the letter. I did it just as it came to me, but I tried my best to please Raymond because I didn't have any reason not to please him. Then I read it out loud. He listened, smoking and nodding his head; then he asked

me to read it again. He was very pleased. He said, "I could tell you knew about these things." I didn't notice at first, but he had stopped calling me "monsieur." It was only when he announced "Now you're a pal, Meursault" and said it again that it struck me. He repeated his remark and I said, "Yes." I didn't mind being his pal, and he seemed set on it. He sealed the letter and we finished off the wine. Then we sat and smoked for a while without saying anything. Outside, everything was quiet; we heard the sound of a car passing. I said, "It's late." Raymond thought so too. He remarked how quickly the time passed, and in a way it was true. I felt sleepy, but it was hard for me to get up. I must have looked tired, because Raymond told me not to let things get to me. At first I didn't understand. Then he explained that he'd heard about Maman's death but that it was one of those things that was bound to happen sooner or later. I thought so too.

I got up. Raymond gave me a very firm handshake and said that men always understand each other. I left his room, closing the door behind me, and paused for a minute in the dark, on the landing. The house was quiet, and a breath of dark, dank air wafted up from deep in the stairwell. All I could hear was the blood pounding in my ears. I stood there, motionless. And in old Salamano's room, the dog whimpered softly.