

PART II: CHAPTER 2

There are some things I've never liked talking about. When I went to prison, I realized after a few days that I wouldn't like talking about this part of my life.

Later on, I didn't see any point in being so reluctant any more. In actual fact I wasn't actually waiting in prison for the first few days: I was vaguely waiting for something to happen. It was only after Marie's first and only visit that it all started. From the day I got her letter (telling me that they wouldn't let her come any more because she wasn't my wife), from that day on, I felt that my cell was my home and that my life was at a standstill. When I was first arrested, I was put in a room with several other prisoners, most of them Arabs. They laughed when they saw me. Then they asked me what I'd done. I told them that I'd killed an Arab and there was silence. But a few minutes later it began to get dark. They told me how to lay out the mat I had to sleep on. One end of it could be rolled up to make a bolster. All night I had bugs crawling over my face. A few days later I was confined to a cell by myself where I slept on a wooden bench. I had a toilet bucket and a tin basin. The prison was right at the top of the town and, through a tiny window, I could just see the sea. One day when I was clinging to the bars, with my face straining towards the light, a warder came in told me that I had a visitor. I thought it must be Marie. It was.

To get to the visiting room I went down a long corridor, then down some stairs, and finally along another corridor. I entered a very large room lit by a huge bay-window. Two rows of bars ran the length of the room, dividing it into three sections. Between the two rows of bars was a gap of eight or ten yards which separated the visitors from the prisoners. I noticed Marie standing opposite me with her striped dress and her suntanned face. On my side there were about ten prisoners, mostly Arabs. Marie was surrounded by Moorish women and standing between two visitors: a small tight-lipped old lady, dressed in black and a large, bare-headed lady who was talking in a very loud voice and waving her arms about. Because of the distance between the bars, both visitors and prisoners had to raise their voices. When I entered the room, the noise echoing off the huge, bare walls and the harsh light pouring down out of the sky and reflecting off the windows made me feel rather dizzy. My cell was much quieter and darker. It took me a few seconds to adjust. And yet I ended up seeing every face clearly and distinctly in the bright light. I noticed that there was a warder sitting at the far end of the space between the two rows of bars. Most of the Arab prisoners and their families had crouched down opposite each other. They weren't shouting. In spite of the din, they were managing to make themselves heard by talking in very low voices. Their muffled murmuring, coming from lower down, formed a kind of continuo for the conversations going backwards and forwards above their heads. I took all this in very quickly as I walked towards Marie. Already pressed up against the bars, she was smiling at me as hard as she could. I thought she looked very beautiful, but I didn't know how to tell her.

'Well?' she said in a very loud voice. 'Well, here I am.' 'Are you all right, have you got everything you want?' 'Yes, everything.'

Commented [1]:
What was he waiting for?

Commented [2]:
What was Camus' s attitude towards the Arabs. Note the presentation. Is there any Arab who is named in the text?

Commented [3]:
Note the differences in how the Arabs are presented. Pay attention to the non-verbal cues

We stopped talking and Marie went on smiling. The fat woman was yelling at the man next to me, a tall blond, honest-looking chap who must have been her husband. They were in the middle of a conversation.

'Jeanne wouldn't take him,' she was shouting at the top of her voice. 'Yes, yes,' the man kept saying. 'I told her you'd take home back when you got out, but she wouldn't take him.'

Marie shouted across in turn that Raymond wished me well and I said, 'Thanks.' But my voice was drowned by the man next to me asking if he was 'all right.' His wife laughed and said he'd 'never been better.' The prisoner on my left, a small man with delicate hands wasn't saying anything. I noticed that he was standing opposite the little old lady and that they were gazing intently at each other. But I didn't have time to watch them for very long because Marie shouted to me that I must keep hoping. I said, 'Yes.' At the same time I was looking at her and I wanted to squeeze her shoulders through her dress. I wanted to feel the soft material and I didn't quite know what else I was supposed to keep hoping for. But that must have been what Marie meant because she was still smiling. All I could see was the flash of her teeth and the little creases round her eyes. She shouted again, 'You'll get out and we'll get married!' I answered, 'You think so?' but mainly to keep the conversation going. Then very quickly and still in a very loud voice she said yes, I'd be let off and we'd go swimming again. But the other woman was yelling across in her turn to say that she'd left a hamper in the clerk's office. She was enumerating all the things she'd put in it. He must check them all because they cost a lot of money. The man on the other side of me and his mother were still gazing at each other. The murmuring of the Arabs continued down below. Outside the light suddenly seemed to swell up against the bay-window.

I was feeling rather ill and I'd have liked to leave. I found the noise quite painful. But on the other hand, I wanted to make the most of having Marie there. I don't know how much time went by. Marie told me about her work and she never stopped smiling. The murmuring and the shouting and talking crossed backwards and forwards. The only oasis of silence was just next to me where the young man and the little old lady were gazing at each other. One by one the Arabs were taken away. Almost everyone stopped talking as soon as the first one went out. The little old lady stepped up to the bars and, at the same moment, a warder beckoned to her son. He said, 'Goodbye, mother,' and she put her hand through the bars to give him a long, slow little wave.

She went out as another man came in, hat in hand, and took her place. A prisoner was brought in and they began an animated conversation, but in low voices, because by now the room was silent again. They came to fetch the man on my right and his wife said to him, without lowering her voice as if she hadn't noticed that she didn't need to shout any more. 'Look after yourself and take care.' Then it was my turn. Marie blew me a kiss. I looked round before disappearing. She was standing quite

Commented [4]:
Hope for?

Commented [5]:
Was Meursault fascinated by this?

Commented [6]:
Why did this scene catch his eye?

Commented [7]:
Significance?

still, with her face squashed up against the bars, and wearing that same strained, disjointed some.

It was soon after that that she wrote to me. And it was from that point on that the things I've never liked talking about began. But after all, I mustn't exaggerate and **it was easier for me than for others**. When I was first imprisoned, though, the worst thing was that **I kept thinking like a free man**. For instance, I'd suddenly want to be on a beach and to be able to walk down to the sea. When I imagined the sound of the first little waves under the soles of my feet, the feel of the water on my body and the freedom it would give me, I'd suddenly realize how closed in I was by my prison walls. But that only lasted a few months. After that, I thought like a prisoner. I'd look forward to my daily walk in the courtyard or to my lawyer's visits. And I managed quite well the rest of the time. I often thought in those days that even if I'd been made to live in a hollow tree trunk, with nothing to do but look up at the bit of sky overhead, I'd gradually have **got used to it**. I'd have looked forward to seeing my lawyer's curious ties and just as, in another world, I used to wait for Saturdays to embrace Marie's body. And come to think of it, I wasn't in a hollow tree. There were others unhappier than I was. **Anyway it was an idea of mother's and she often used to repeat it, that you ended up getting used to everything**.

Besides, I didn't usually take things as far as that. The first few months were bad. But the very fact that I had to make an effort helped me through them. For instance, I had a tormenting desire for a woman. That was only **natural**, I was a young man. I never thought specifically of Marie. But I'd do so often be thinking about a woman, about women in general, about all the ones I'd known and all the occasions when I'd loved them, that my cell would fill with faces, the embodiments of my desires. In one sense, it unsettled me. But in another, it killed time. I'd ended up making friends with the chief warder who used to come round at meal times with the kitchen boy. He was the one who first talked to me about women. He was the one who first talked to me about women. He told me that it was the first thing all the others complained about. I told him that I was like them and that thought we were treated unfairly. 'Yes,' he said, 'but that's precisely why you're put in prison.' 'What do you mean, that's why?' 'Well, of course. Freedom, that's why. You're deprived of your freedom.' 'I'd never thought of that. I agreed. That's true, I said, 'otherwise it wouldn't be punishment.' **'Right, you understand things, you do. The others don't**. But they end up doing it by themselves.' The warder left after that.

Another thing was cigarettes. When I went into prison they took away my belt, my shoe-laces, my tie and everything. I had in my pockets, particularly my cigarettes. As soon as I got my cell, I asked for them back. But they told me that it wasn't allowed. The first few days were really bad. It **was possibly this that shook me up the most**. I used to break bits of wood off my bed-plank and suck them. I'd feel permanently sick all day. I couldn't understand why I was being deprived of something that didn't do anyone any harm. Later on I realized that it was all part of the punishment. But by that time **I'd got used to not** smoking, so for me it was no longer a punishment.

Commented [8]:
Self and others?

Commented [9]:
Why?

Commented [10]:
routine

Commented [11]:
even in this prison community, Meursault is not like the rest.

Apart from these few annoyances, I wasn't too unhappy. The main problem, once again, **was killing time**. I ended up not being bored at all as soon as I learnt how to remember things. Sometimes I'd start thinking about my room and, in my imagination, I'd set off from one corner and walk round making a mental note of everything I saw on the way. At first it didn't take very long. But every time I did it, it took a bit longer. Because I'd remember every piece of furniture, and on every piece of furniture, every object and, on every object, every detail, every mark, crack or chip, and then even the colour or the grain of the wood. At the same time, I'd try not to lose track of my inventory, to enumerate everything. So that, by the end of a few weeks, I could spend hours doing nothing but listing the things in my room. And the more I thought about it the more things I dug out of my memory that I hadn't noticed before or that I'd forgotten about. I realized then that a man who'd only lived for a day could easily live for a hundred years in prison. He'd have enough memories not to get bored. In a way, that was a good thing.

Another thing was sleeping. At first I didn't sleep well at night and I didn't sleep at all during the day. Gradually my nights got better and I managed to sleep during the day as well. In fact, during the last few months I was sleeping sixteen to eighteen hours a day. So that left me six hours to kill with my meals, my bodily functions, my memories and the story of the Czechoslovakian.

Between my mattress and my bed-plank, I'd actually found an old scrap of newspaper which had gone all yellow and transparent and was almost stuck to the material. It was a small news story the beginning was missing, but it must have taken place in Czechoslovakia. A man had left some Czech village to go and make his fortune. Twenty-five years later he'd come back with a wife and child. His mother and sister were running a hotel in his native village. In order to surprise them, he'd left his wife and child at another hotel and gone to see his mother who hadn't recognized him when he'd walked in. just for fun, he'd decided to book a room. He'd shown them his money. During the night his mother and his sister had clubbed him to death with a hammer to steal his money, and then thrown his body into the river. The next morning, the wife had come along and without realizing revealed the traveller's identity. The mother had hanged herself. The sister had thrown herself down a well. I must have read this story thousands of times. On the one hand, it was probable. **On the other, it was quite natural**. Anyway, I decided **that the traveller had deserved it really and that you should never play around**.

So what with my sleeping for hours, remembering things, reading my news story and watching the changes of light and darkness, the time passed. I'd read somewhere that you ended up losing track of time in prison. But it hadn't meant much to me. I hadn't understood how days could be **both long and short at the same time**. Long to live though I suppose, but so distended that they ended up flowing into one another. They lost their names. The words yesterday and tomorrow were the only ones that still meant something to me.

Commented [12]:

This illogical anecdote relates to both the novel's ubiquitous idea of irrationality as well as the specific scenario in which Meursault is placed throughout the duration of his court trial.

Camus employs various techniques to convey a general sentiment of absurdism over the course of the entire storyline. Such a viewpoint generates a nonchalant attitude emitted by the emotionally detached Meursault from the novel's commencement, and is reflected in the narrator's disregard for even the slightest possibility of the existence of any lucid meaning for the world's nature. This lack of perceptible explanation for the events taking place around him is perhaps the very reason why Meursault finds his "crime story" so appealing. The son's murder, a case where any apparent rationale is indeed absent, proves to be an incident where the so-called "gentle indifference of the world" that Meursault later submits to runs rampant through the streets of society's disorderly system. A scheme devoid of a sense of organization and reeking of unadulterated happenstance, the social order (or lack thereof) is governed not by comprehensible grounds for occurrence but rather by inadvertent outcomes. The same irrationality that causes the son's death is responsible for Meursault's previous decision to wed Marie and subsequent murder of the Arab. In both instances, an inexplicable misfortune results from circumstances which do not naturally create/produce such an effect; meaningless, unjustified catastrophes deficient of obvious motives. The article, however, is also emblematic in a more specific manner after Meursault reads it for the last time while incarcerated.

The omnipresent conflict throughout Meursault's endeavors is that of chance versus fate, randomness versus logical results; a variance at hand in the courtroom. During his trial, he is confronted with such a clash; an inconsistency between perspectives. For the duration of the hearing, Meursault exclusively asserts that there is indeed no cogent order to human existence and its accompanying ventures, and is unique in stating that there is no distinct motivation for any individual's actions. For the sole reason that those around him denounce this ideology as a fallacy, however, he is immediately viewed as immoral. Due to their superficiality, those who condemn Meursault's principles are inclined to search for explanation where there is in fact none, conforming to the previously accepted ideals of the world around them. This illustrates society's tendency to synthetically fabricate explanations for causes and their respective effects. The prosecutor and even Meursault's own lawyer exemplify this action, which proves to be carried out in vain; attempting to assign groundwork to an innately meaningless situation, trying to elucidate an inherently ambiguous state. Based on this very premise, the trial is the essence that embodies humankind's fruitless aspiration to designate ordered meaning to incidents that occur for no just reason whatsoever.

The interrelatedness of the events within *The Stranger* assists in reconciling each to form the novel's general theme of absurdity, rejecting the trite submission of ...

When one day the warder told me that I'd been there **five months**, I believed it but I didn't understand. For me it was for ever the same day that I was spinning out in my cell and the same task I was pursuing. That day, after the warder had left, I looked at myself in my tin plate. **My** reflection seemed to stay serious even when I tried to smile at it. I shook it up and down in front of me. I smiled it and still looked sad and severe. It was the end of the day, the part I don't like talking about, the nameless part, when evening noises would rise up from every floor of the prison in a cortege of silence. I went up to the skylight and, in the fading light, I had another look at my reflection. It was still serious, and what was surprising about that when at that point I was serious too? But at the same moment, and for the first time in several months, **I clearly heard the sound of my own voice. I recognized it as the one that had been ringing in my ears for days on end and I realized that all that time I'd been talking to myself.** I the remembered what the nurse said at mother's funeral. **No, there was no way** out and no one can imagine what the evenings in prisons are like.

Commented [13]:

Why is there a separation between the self and the reflection?

Commented [14]:

Refer to chapter 1