

Stockton  
F-1

Copyright © 1974 by Grove Press, Inc.

All rights reserved

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission of the publisher.

Grove Press  
841 Broadway  
New York, N.Y. 10003

Originally published in French as *Querelle de Brest*, copyright © 1953 by Editions Gallimard, Paris

The Library of Congress has cataloged the first printing of this title as follows:

Genet, Jean, 1910-

[Querelle de Brest. English]

Querelle/Jean Genet; translated from the original French by

Anselm Hollo—New York: Grove Press.

276 p.

Translation of Querelle de Brest.

I. Title

PZ3.G2866 Qd 3 843'.912 73-17693

[PQ2613.E53]

ISBN 0-394-62368-1 74[8302r83]rev

ISBN 0-8021-5157-4

Manufactured in the United States of America

## QUERELLE

10 9 8 7 6 5 4

Genet, Jean. Querelle. New York: Grove  
Press, 1974.

THE NOTION OF MURDER OFTEN BRINGS TO MIND THE NOTION OF sea and sailors. Sea and sailors do not, at first, appear as a definite image—it is rather that “murder” starts up a feeling of waves. If one considers that seaports are the scene of frequent crimes, the association seems self-explanatory; but there are numerous stories from which we learn that the murderer was a man of the sea—either a real one, or a fake one—and if the latter is the case, the crime will be even more closely connected to the sea. The man who dons a sailor’s outfit does not do so out of prudence only. His disguise relieves him from the necessity of going through all the rigamarole required in the execution of any preconceived murder. Thus we could say that the outfit does the following things for the criminal: it envelops him in clouds; it gives him the appearance of having come from that far-off line of the horizon where sea touches sky; with long, undulating and muscular strides he can walk across the waters, personifying

the Great Bear, the Pole Star or the Southern Cross; it (we are still discussing this particular disguise, as used by a criminal) it allows him to assume dark continents where the sun sets and rises, where the moon sanctions murder under roofs of bamboo beside motionless rivers teeming with alligators; it gives him the opportunity to act within the illusion of a mirage, to strike while one of his feet is still resting upon a beach in Oceania and the other propelling him across the waters toward Europe; it grants him oblivion in advance, as sailors always "return from far away"; it allows him to consider landlubbers as mere vegetation. It cradles the criminal, it enfolds him—in the tight fit of his sweater, in the amplitude of his bell-bottoms. It casts a sleep-spell on the already fascinated victim. We shall talk about the sailor's mortal flesh. We ourselves have witnessed scenes of seduction. In that very long sentence beginning "it envelops him in clouds . . .," we did indulge in facile poeticisms, each one of the propositions being merely an argument in favor of the author's personal proclivities. It is, admittedly, under the sign of a very singular inner feeling that we would set down the ensuing drama. We would also like to say that it addresses itself to inverts. The notion of love or lust appears as a *natural* corollary to the notion of Sea and Murder—and it is, moreover, the notion of *love against nature*. No doubt the sailors who are transported by ("animated by" would appear more exact, we'll see that later on) the desire and need to murder, apprenticed themselves first to the Merchant Navy, thus are veterans of long voyages, nourished on ships' biscuit and the cat-o'-nine-tails, used to leg-irons for any little mistake, paid off in some obscure port, signed on again to handle some questionable cargo; and yet, it is difficult, in a city of fogs and granite, to brush past the huskies of the Fighting Navy, trained and trimmed by and for deeds we like to think of as daring, those shoulders, profiles, earrings, those tough and turbulent rumps, those strong and supple boys, without imagining them capable of murders that seem entirely justified

by their deigning to commit them with their noble bodies. Whether they descend from heaven or return from a realm where they have consorted with sirens and even more fabulous monsters, on land these sailors inhabit buildings of stone, arsenals, palaces whose solidity is opposed to the nervousness, the feminine irritability of the waters (does not the sailor, in one of his songs, speak of how ". . . the sea's my best girl"?), by jetties loaded with chains, bollards, buoys, maritime paraphernalia to which, even when farthest from the sea, they know themselves anchored. To match their stature they are provided with barracks, forts, disused penitentiaries, magnificent pieces of architecture, all of them. Brest is a hard, solid city, built out of gray Breton granite. Its rocklike quality anchors the port, giving the sailors a sense of security, a launching point when outward bound, a haven of rest after the continuous wave-motion of the sea. If Brest ever seems more lighthearted, it is when a feeble sun gilds the façades which are as noble as those of Venice, or when its narrow streets teem with carefree sailors—or, *then*, even when there is fog and rain. The action of this story starts three days after a despatch-boat, *Le Vengeur*, had anchored in the Roads. Other warships lie round her: *La Panthère*, *Le Vainqueur*, *Le Sanglant*, and around these, *Le Richelieu*, *Le Béarn*, *Le Dunkerque*, and more. Those names have their counterparts in the past. On the walls of a side chapel in the church of Saint-Yves, in La Rochelle, hang a number of small votive paintings representing ships that have been either lost or saved: *La Mutine*, *Le Saphir*, *Le Cyclone*, *La Fée*, *La Jeune Aimée*. These ships had had no influence whatsoever on Querelle who had seen them sometimes as a child, yet we must mention their existence. For the ships' crews, Brest will always be the city of La Féria. Far from France, sailors never talk about this brothel without cracking a joke and hooting like owls, the way they talk about ducks in China or weird Annamites, and they evoke the proprietor and his wife in terms like:

"Shoot a game of craps with you—like at Nono's, I mean!"

"That guy, for a piece of ass he'd do anything—he'd even play with Nono."

"Him there, he went to La Féria to lose."

While the Madam's name is never mentioned, the names of "La Féria" and "Nono" must have traveled all around the world, in sarcastic asides on the lips of sailors everywhere. On board there never is anybody who would know exactly what La Féria really is, nor do they precisely know the rules of the game which has given it such a reputation, but no one, not even the greenest recruit, dare ask for an explanation; each and every seafarin' man will have it understood that he knows what it is all about. Thus the establishment in Brest appears ever in a fabulous light, and the sailors, as they approach that port, secretly dream of that house of ill repute which they'll mention only as a laughing matter. Georges Querelle, the hero of this book, speaks of it less than anyone. He knows that his own brother is the Madam's lover. Here is the letter, received in Cádiz, informing him of this:

Good Bro.,

I'm writing you these few lines to let you know that I'm back in Brest. I had planned on that dockyard job again, but, nothing doing. So there I was, stuck. And as you know, I'm none too good at finding the jobs, and besides, who wants to work his ass off anyhow. So, to get off the ground again, I went round to Milo's place and right after that the boss lady of La Féria was giving me the old eye. Did my best, we're getting along like a house on fire. The boss doesn't give a shit who goes with his woman, they're just business partners like they say. So, I'm in pretty good shape. Hope you're in good shape too, and when you get some furlough, etc.

(Signed) Robert.

Sometimes it rains in September. The rain makes the light cotton clothes—open shirts and denims—stick to the skin of the muscular men working in port and Arsenal. Again, some evenings the weather is fine when the groups of masons, carpenters, mechanics come out from the shipyards. They are weary. They look heavily burdened, and even when their expressions lighten, their workshoes, their heavy steps seem to shatter the pools of air around them. Slowly, ponderously they traverse the lighter, quicker, more rapid hither-and-thither of sailors on shore leave who have become the pride of this city which will scintillate till dawn with their nautical swagger, the gusts of their laughter, their songs, their merriment, the insults they yell at the girls; with their kisses, their wide collars, the pompons on their hats. The laborers return to their lodgings. All through the day they have toiled (servicemen, soldiers or sailors, never have that feeling of having *toiled*), blending their actions in a network of common endeavor, for the purposes of an achieved work like a visible, tightly drawn knot, and now they are returning. A shadowy friendship—shadowy to them—unites them, and also a quiet hatred. Few of them are married, and the wives of those live some distance away. Toward six o'clock in the evening it is when the workmen pass through the iron gates of the Arsenal and leave the dockyard. They walk up in the direction of the railroad station where the canteens are, or down the road to Recouvrance where they have their furnished rooms in cheap hotels. Most of them are Italians and Spaniards, though there are some North Africans and Frenchmen as well. It is in the midst of such a surfeit of fatigue, heavy muscles, virile lassitude, that Sublieutenant Seblon of the *Vengeur* loves to take his evening walk.

They used to have this cannon permanently trained upon the penitentiary. Today the same cannon (its barrel only) stands

mounted upright in the middle of the same courtyard where once the convicts were mustered for the galleys. It is astonishing that turning criminals into sailors used to be regarded as a form of punishment.

Went past La Féria. Saw nothing. Never any luck. Over in Recouvrance I caught a glimpse of an accordion—a sight I frequently see on board, yet never tire of watching—folding, unfolding on a sailor's thigh.

Se brester, to brace oneself. Derives, no doubt, from bretteur, fighter: and so, relates to se quereller, to pick a fight.

When I learn—if only from the newspaper—that some scandal is breaking, or when I'm just afraid that it may break upon the world, I make preparations to get away: I always believe that I shall be suspected of being the prime mover. I regard myself as a demon-ridden creature, merely because I have imagined certain subjects for scandal.

As for the hoodlums I hold in my arms, tenderly kissing and caressing their faces before gently covering them up again in my sheets, they are no more than a kind of passing thrill and experiment combined. After having been so overwhelmed by the loneliness to which my inversion condemns me, is it really possible that I may some day hold naked in my arms, and continue to hold, pressed close to my body, those young men whose courage and hardness place them so high in my esteem that I long to throw myself at their feet and grovel before them? I dare hardly believe this, and tears well up in my eyes, to thank God for grant-

ing me such happiness. My tears make me feel soft. I melt. My own cheeks still wet with tears, I revel in, and overflow with tenderness for, the flat, hard cheekbones of those boys.

That severe, at times almost suspicious look, a look that seems to pass judgment, with which the pederast appraises every young man he encounters, is really a brief, but intense meditation on his own loneliness. That instant (the duration of the glance) is filled with a concentrated and constant despair, with its own jagged frequency, sheathed in the fear of rebuff. "It would be so great . . .," he thinks. Or, if he isn't thinking, it expresses itself in his frown, in that black, condemning look.

Whenever some part of his body happens to be naked, He (that is Querelle, whose name the officer never writes down—this not merely for the sake of prudence as regards his fellow officers and superiors, since in their eyes the contents of his diary would be quite sufficient to damn him) starts examining it. He looks for blackheads, split nails, red pimples. Irritated when he can't find any, he invents some. As soon as he has nothing better to do, he becomes engrossed in this game. Tonight he is examining his legs: their black, strong hairs are quite soft in spite of their vigorous growth, and thus they create a kind of mist from foot to groin, which softens the roughness and abruptness, one might almost say, the stoniness of his muscles. It amazes me how such a virile trait can envelop his legs with such great sweetness. He amuses himself by applying a burning cigarette to his hairs and then bends over them to savor the scorched smell. He is not smiling any more than usual. His own body in repose is his great passion—a morose, not an exultant passion. Bent over his body, he sees himself there. He examines it with an imaginary magnifying glass. He observes its minuscule irregularities with the scr-

*pulous attention of an entomologist studying the habits of insects. But as soon as He moves, what dazzling revenge his entire body takes, in the glory of its motion!*

*He (Querelle) is never absent-minded, always attentive to what he is doing. Every moment of his life he rejects the dream. He is forever present. He never answers: "I was thinking of something else." And yet the childishness of his obvious preoccupations astonishes me.*

*Hands in pockets, lazily, I would say to him, "Give me a little shove, just to knock the ash off my cigarette," and he would let fly and punch me on the shoulder. I shrug it off.*

*I should have been able to keep my sea legs or hang on to the gunwale, the ship wasn't rolling that hard, but quickly, and with pleasure, I took advantage of the ship's motion to sway and to allow myself to be shifted along, always in his direction. I even managed to brush against his elbow.*

*It is as if a fierce and devoted watchdog, ready to chew up your carotid artery, were following him around, trotting, at times, between the calves of his legs, so that the beast's flanks seem to blend with his thigh muscles, ready to bite, always growling and snarling, so ferocious one expects to see it bite off his balls.*

*After these few excerpts picked (but not entirely at random) from a private journal which suggested his character to us, we would like you to look upon the sailor Querelle, born from that solitude in which the officer himself remained isolated, as a singular figure comparable to the Angel of the Apocalypse,*

whose feet rest on the waters of the sea. By meditating on Querelle, by using, in his imagination, his most beautiful traits, his muscles, his rounded parts, his teeth, his guessed-at genitals, Lieutenant Seblon has turned the sailor into an angel (as we shall see, he describes him as "the Angel of Loneliness"), that is to say, into a being less and less human, crystalline, around whom swirl strands of a music based on the opposite of harmony—or rather, a music that is what remains after harmony has been used up, worn out, and in the midst of which this immense angel moves, slowly, unwitnessed, his feet on the water, but his head—or what should be his head—in a dazzle of rays from a supernatural sun.

They themselves tending to deny it, the strangely close resemblance between the two brothers Querelle appeared attractive only to others. They met only in the evenings, as late as possible, in the one bed of a furnished room not far from where their mother had eked out her meager existence. They met again, perhaps, but somewhere so deep down that they could not see anything clearly, in their love for their mother, and certainly in their almost daily arguments. In the morning they parted without a word. They wanted to ignore each other. Already, at the age of fifteen, Querelle had smiled the smile that was to be peculiarly his for the rest of his life. He had chosen a life among thieves and spoke their argot. We'll try to bear this in mind in order to understand Querelle whose mental makeup and very feelings depend upon, and assume the form of, a certain syntax, a particular murky orthography. In his conversation we find turns like "peel him raw!" "boy, am I flying," "oh, beat off!" "he better not show his ass in here again," "he got burnt all right," "get that punk," "see the guy making tracks," "hey, baby, dig my hard-on," "suck me off," etc., expressions which are never pronounced clearly, but muttered in a kind of monotone and as if from within, without the speaker really "seeing" them. They are not projected, and thus Querelle's words never reveal him; they do not really define him

at all. On the contrary, they seem to enter through his mouth, to pile up inside him, to settle and to form a thick mud deposit, out of which, at times, a transparent bubble rises, exploding delicately on his lips. What one hears, then, is one of those bits of the argot.

As for the police in port and city, Brest lay under the authority of its Commissariat: in the time of our novel there were two Inspectors, joined together by a singular friendship, by the names of Mario Daugas and Marcellin. The latter was little more than an excrescence to Mario (it is well known that policemen always come in pairs), dull and painstaking enough, yet sometimes a source of great comfort to his colleague. However, there was yet another collaborator whom Mario had chosen, more subtle and more dear—more easily sacrificed, too, should that become necessary: Dédé.

Like every French town, Brest had its Monoprix store, a favorite stamping ground for Dédé and numerous sailors who circulated among the counters, coveting—and sometimes purchasing—pairs of gloves, of all things. To complete the picture, the old-time control by the Admiralty had been replaced by the services of the Préfecture Maritime.

Bought or stolen from a sailor, the blue denim pants belled over his entrancing feet, now motionless and arched after the final table-shaking stamp. He was wearing highly polished black shoes, cracked and crinkled at the point reached by the ripples of blue denim that ran down from the source of his belt. His torso was encased very tightly in a turtleneck jersey of white, slightly soiled wool. Querelle's parted lips slowly began to close. He started to raise the half-smoked cigarette to his mouth, but his hand came to rest halfway up his chest, and the mouth remained half-open: he was gazing at Gil and Roger,

who were united by the almost visible thread of their glances, by the freshness of their smiles; and Gil seemed to be singing for the boy, and Roger, like the sovereign at some intimate rite of debauch, to be favoring this young eighteen-year-old mason, so that with his voice he could be the hero of a roadside tavern for a night. The way the sailor was watching the two of them had the effect of isolating them. Once again, Querelle became aware of his mouth hanging half-open. His smile became more pronounced at the corner of his mouth, almost imperceptibly. A tinge of irony began to spread over his features, then over his entire body, giving him and his relaxed posture leaning back against the wall an air of amused sarcasm. Altered by the raising of an eyebrow, to match the crooked smile, his expression became somewhat malicious as he continued his scrutiny of the two young men. The smile vanished from Gil's lips, as if the entire ball of string had been unrolled, and at the same moment expired on Roger's face; but four seconds later, regaining his breath and taking up the song again, Gil, once more on top of the table, resumed his smile, which brought back and sustained, until the very last couplet of the song, the smile on Roger's lips. Not for a second did their eyes stray from the eyes of the other. Gil was singing. Querelle shifted his shoulders against the wall of the bistro. He became aware of himself, felt himself pitting his own living mass, the powerful muscles of his back, against the black and indestructible matter of that wall. Those two shadowy substances struggled in silence. Querelle knew the beauty of his back. We shall see how, a few days later, he was to secretly dedicate it to Lieutenant Seblon. Almost without moving, he let his shoulders ripple against the wall, its stones. He was a strong man. One hand—the other remaining in the pocket of his peacoat—raised a half-smoked cigarette to his lips, still holding the half-smile. Robert and the two other sailors were oblivious to everything but the song. Querelle retained his smile. To use an expression much favored by soldiers, Querelle shone by his absence. After letting a little smoke drift in the

direction of his thoughts (as though he wanted to veil them, or show them a touch of insolence), his lips remained slightly drawn apart from his teeth, whose beauty he knew, their whiteness dimmed, now, by the night and the shadow cast by his upper lip. Watching Gil and Roger, now reunited by glance and smile, he could not make up his mind to withdraw, to enclose within himself those teeth and their gentle splendor, which had the same restful effect on his vague thoughts as the blue of the sea has on our eyes. Meanwhile, he was lightly running his tongue over his palate. It was alive. One of the sailors started to go through the motions of buttoning his peacoat, turning up the collar. Querelle was not used to the idea, one that had never really been formulated, that he was a monster. He considered, he observed his past with an ironic smile, frightened and tender at the same time, to the extent that this past became confused with what he himself was. Thus might a young boy whose soul is evident in his eyes, but who has been metamorphosed into an alligator, even if he were not fully conscious of his horrendous head and jaws, consider his scaly body, his solemn, gigantic tail, with which he strikes the water or the beach or brushes against that of other monsters, and which extends him with the same touching, heart-rending and indestructible majesty as the train of a robe, adorned with lace, with crests, with battles, with a thousand crimes, worn by a Child Empress, extends her. He knew the horror of being alone, seized by an immortal enchantment in the midst of the world of the living. Only to him had been accorded the horrendous privilege to perceive his monstrous participation in the realms of the great muddy rivers and the rain forests. And he was apprehensive that some light, emanating from within his body, or from his true consciousness, might not be illuminating him, might not, in some way from inside the scaly carapace, give off a reflection of that true form and make him visible to men, who would then have to hunt him down.

In some places along the ramparts of Brest, trees have been

planted, and these grow in alleys bearing the perhaps derisive name of the "Bois de Boulogne." Here, in the summer, there are a few bistros where one can sit and drink at wooden tables swollen by rain and fog, under the trees or in arbors. The sailors had vanished into the shade of those trees, with a girl; Querelle let them, his buddies, take their turns with her, and then he came up to her as she lay stretched out on the grass. He proceeded to unbutton his fly, but after a brief, charming hesitation expressed in his fingers, he readjusted it again. Querelle felt calm. He had only to give the slightest turn of the head, to left or right, to feel his cheek rub against the stiff, upturned collar of his peacoat. This contact reassured him. By it, he knew himself to be clothed, marvelously clothed.

Later, when he was taking off his shoes, the bistro scene came back to Querelle's mind, who lacked the ability to assign it any precise significance. He could hardly put it into words. He knew only that it had aroused a faint sense of amusement in him. He could not have said why. Knowing the severity, the austerity almost, of his face and its pallor, this irony gave him what is commonly called a sarcastic air. For a moment or two he had remained amazed by the rapport that was established and understood and became almost an object between the eyes of those two: the one up on the table, singing there, his head bent down toward the other, who was sitting and gazing up at him. Querelle pulled off one of his socks. Apart from the material benefits derived from his murders, Querelle was enriched by them in other ways. They deposited in him a kind of slimy sediment, and the stench it gave off served to deepen his despair. From each one of his victims he had preserved something a little dirty: a slip, a bra, shoelaces, a handkerchief—objects sufficient to disprove his alibis and to condemn him. These relics were firsthand evidence of his splendor, of his triumphs. They were the shameful details, upon which all luminous but uncertain appearances rest. In the world of sailors with their striking good looks, virility, and pride, they were the secret



counterparts of a greasy, broken-toothed comb at the bottom of a pocket; full-dress gaiters, from a distance impeccable as sails, but, like those, far from true white; a pair of elegant but poorly tailored pants; badly drawn tattoos; a filthy handkerchief; socks with holes in them. What for us is the strongest memory of Querelle's expression can best be described by an image that comes to mind: delicate metal strands, sparsely barbed, easily overcome, grasped by a prisoner's heavy hand, or grazing against sturdy fabric. Almost in spite of himself, quietly, to one of his mates, already stretched out in his hammock, Querelle said:

"Pair of fuckin' faggots, those two."

"Which two?"

"What?"

Querelle raised his head. His buddy, it seemed, didn't get it. And that was the end of the conversation. Querelle pulled off his other sock and turned in. Not that he wanted to sleep, or think over the scene in the bistro. Once he was stretched out, he had at last the leisure to consider his own affairs, and he had to think quick, in spite of his fatigue. The owner of La Féria would take the two kilos of opium, if Querelle only could get them out of the despatch-boat. The customs officials opened all sailors' bags, even the smallest ones. Coming ashore, all but the officers were subjected to a thorough search. Without cracking a smile, Querelle thought of the Lieutenant. The enormity of this idea struck him even while he was thinking what only he himself could have translated into:

"He's been giving me the old eye for some time now. Nervous like a cat on a hot tin roof. I got him hooked, I guess."

Querelle was glad to know that Robert was now living a life of Oriental ease and luxury; to know that he was a brothel Madam's lover as well as a friend to her obliging husband. He closed his eyes. He regained that region in himself where his brother was there with him. He let himself sink into a state where neither could be distinguished from the other. From this

state he was able to extract, first, some words, and then, by a fairly elementary process, little by little, a thought—which, as it rose from those depths, again differentiated him from Robert and proposed singular acts, an entire system of solitary operations: quite gently these became his own, completely his, and Vic was there, with him, taking part. And Querelle, whose thoughts had overcome his personal autonomy in order to reach Vic, turned away again, re-entered himself, in the blind search for that inexpressible limbo which is like some inconsistent *paté* of love. He was hardly touching his curled-up prick. He felt no urge. While still at sea, he had announced to the other sailors that once in Brest, he was sure going to shoot his wad; but tonight he wasn't even thinking about whether he should have kissed that girl.

Querelle was an exact replica of his brother. Robert, perhaps a little more taciturn, the other, a little hotter in temper (nuances by which one could tell them from each other, except if one was a furious girl). It so happens that we ourselves acquired our sense of Querelle's existence on a particular day, we could give the exact date and hour of—when we decided to write this story (and that is a word not to be used to describe some adventure or series of adventures that has already been lived through). Little by little, we saw how Querelle—already contained in our flesh—was beginning to grow in our soul, to feed on what is best in us, above all on our despair at not being in any way inside him, while having him inside of ourselves. After this discovery of Querelle we want him to become the Hero, even to those who may despise him. Following, within ourselves, his destiny, his development, we shall see how he lends himself to this in order to realize himself in a conclusion that appears to be (from then on) in complete accord with his very own will, his very own fate.

The scene we are about to describe is a transposition of the

event which revealed Querelle to us. (We are still referring to that ideal and heroic personage, the fruit of our secret loves.) We must say, of that event, that it was of equal import to the Visitation. No doubt it was only long after it had taken place that we recognized it as being "big" with consequences, yet there and then we may be said to have felt a true Annunciatory thrill. Finally: to become visible to you, to become a character in a novel, Querelle must be shown apart from ourselves. Only then will you get to know the apparent, and real, beauty of his body, his attitudes, his exploits, and their slow disintegration.

The farther you descend toward the port of Brest, the denser the fog seems to grow. It is so thick at Recouvrance, after you cross the Penfeld bridge, that the houses, their walls and roofs appear to be afloat. In the alleys leading down to the quayside you find yourself alone. Here and there you encounter the dim, fringed sun, like a light from a half-open dairy doorway. On you go through that vaporous twilight, until confronted once more by the opaque matter, the dangerous fog that shelters: a drunken sailor reeling home on heavy legs—a docker hunched over a girl—a hoodlum, perhaps armed with a knife—us—you—hearts pounding. The fog brought Gil and Roger closer together. It gave them mutual confidence and friendship. Though they were hardly aware of it as yet, this privacy instilled in them a hesitation, a little fearful, a little tremulous, a charming emotion akin to that in children when they walk along, hands in pockets, touching, stumbling over each other's feet.

"Shit—watch your step! Keep going."

"That must be the quay. Never mind 'em."

"And why not? You got the jitters?"

"No, but sometimes . . ."

Now and again they sensed a woman walking by, saw the steady glow of a cigarette, guessed at the outline of a couple locked in an embrace.

"Howzat . . . ? Sometimes what?"

"Oh come on, Gil, no need to take it out on me. It ain't my fault my sister wasn't able to make it."

And, a little quieter, after two more steps in silence:

"You can't have been thinking too much about Paulette, last night, dancing with that brunette?"

"What the fuck's that to you? Yeah, I danced with her. So what?"

"Well! You weren't just dancing, you took her home, too."

"So what, I'm not hitched to your sister, jack. Look who's talking. All I'm saying is, you could have made sure that she came along." Gil was speaking quite loudly, but none too distinctly, so as to be understood only by Roger. Then he lowered his voice, and a note of anxiety crept into it.

"So, what about it?"

"Gil, you know it, I just couldn't swing it for you. I swear."

They turned to the left, in the direction of the Navy warehouses. A second time they bumped into one another. Automatically, Gil put his hand on the boy's shoulder. It remained there. Roger slackened his pace, hoping that his buddy would stop. Would it happen? He was almost melting, feeling infinitely tender; but at that moment someone passed by—he and Gilbert were not in a place of perfect solitude. Gil let go of his shoulder and put his hand back into his pocket, and Roger thought that he had been rejected. Yet, when he took his hand away, Gil couldn't help bearing down a little harder, just as he let go, as if some kind of regret at taking it away had added to its weight. And now Gil had a hard-on.

"Shit."

He tried to visualize a sharp image of Paulette's face, and was immediately tempted by his erratic mind to concentrate on another point, on what Roger's sister had under her skirt, between her thighs. Needing an easily, immediately accessible physical prop, he said to himself, thinking in the inflections of cynicism:

"Well, here's her brother, right beside me, in the fog!"

It was then that it seemed to him it would be a delight to enter that warmth, that black, fur-fringed, slightly pursed hole that emits such vague, yet ponderous and fiery odors, even in corpses already cold.

"She gives me the hots, your sister, you know."

Roger smiled, from ear to ear. He turned his radiant face toward Gil.

"Aaahh . . ."

The sound was both gentle and hoarse, seeming to originate in the pit of Gil's stomach, nothing so much as an anguished sigh born at the base of his throbbing rod. He realized that there was a rapid, immediate line connecting the base of his prick to the back of his throat and to that muffled groan. We would like these reflections, these observations, which cannot fully round out nor delineate the characters of the book, to give you permission to act not so much as onlookers as creators of these very characters, who will then slowly disengage themselves from your own preoccupations. Little by little, Gil's prick was getting lively. In his pants pocket his hand had hold of it, flattening it against his belly. Indeed, it had the stature of a tree, a mossy-boled oak with lamenting mandrakes being born among its roots. (Sometimes, when he woke up with a hard-on, Gil would address his prick as "my hanged man.") They walked on, but at a slower pace.

"She gives you the hots, eh?"

The light of Roger's smile came close to illuminating the fog, making the stars sparkle through. It made him happy to hear, right there beside him, how Gil's amorous desire made his mouth water.

"You think that's funny, don'cha."

Teeth clenched, hands still in pockets, Gil turned to face the boy and forced him to retreat into a recess in the stone wall. He kept pushing him with his belly, his chest. Roger kept on

smiling, a little less radiantly perhaps, hardly shrinking back from the thrust of the other young man's face. Gil was now leaning against him with his entire vigorous body.

"You think that's a scream, hey?"

Gil took one of his hands out of his pocket. He put it on Roger's shoulder, so close to the collar that the thumb brushed against the cool skin of the kid's neck. His shoulders against the wall, Roger let himself slide down a little, as if wanting to appear smaller. He was still smiling.

"So say something? You think it's funny? Eh?"

Gil advanced like a conqueror, almost like a lover. His mouth was both cruel and soft, like those movie seducers' mouths under their thin black mustaches, and his expression turned suddenly so serious that Roger's smile, by a faint drooping of the corners of his mouth, now seemed a little sad. With his back to the wall, Roger kept on sliding, holding that wistful smile with which he looked to be sinking, submerging in the monstrous wave that Gil was riding, one hand still in pocket, clutching that great spar.

"Aaahh . . ."

Again, Gil voiced that groan, hoarse and remote, that we have had occasion to describe.

"Oh, yeah, I'd like to have her here, all right. And you bet your ass I'd screw her, and good, if I had her here, the way I've got you!"

Roger said nothing. His smile disappeared. His eyes kept on meeting Gil's stare, and the only gentleness he could see there was in Gil's eyebrows, powdered with chalk and cement dust.

"Gil!"

He thought: "This is Gil. It's Gilbert Turko. He's from Poland. He's been working at the Arsenal, on the gantry, with the other masons. He's in a rage."

Close to Gil's ear, under his breath which entered the fog, he murmured:

"Gill"

"Oh . . . ! Oh . . . ! I sure could use a piece of her, right now. You, you look alike, you know. You've got that same little mouth of hers."

He moved his hand closer to Roger's neck. Finding himself so the master, in the heart of the light mass of watery air, increased Gil Turko's desire to be tough, sharp and heavy. To rip the fog, to destroy it with a sudden brutal gesture, would perhaps be enough to affirm his virility, which otherwise, on his return to quarters tonight, would suffer mean and powerful humiliation.

"Got her eyes, too. What a shame you ain't her. Hey, what's this? You passing out?"

As if to prevent Roger from "passing out," he pressed his belly closer still to his, pushing him against the wall, while his free hand kept hold of the charming head, holding it above the waves of a powerful and arrogant sea, the sea that was Gil. They remained motionless, one shoring up the other.

"What are you going to tell her?"

"I'll try to get her to come along tomorrow."

Despite his inexperience, Roger understood the extent, if not quite the meaning of his confusion, when he heard the sound of his own voice: it was toneless.

"And the other thing I told you about?"

"I'll try my best about that too. We going back now?"

They pulled apart, quickly. Suddenly they heard the sea. From the very beginning of this scene they had been close to the water's edge. For a moment both of them felt frightened at the thought of having been so close to danger. Gil took out a cigarette and lit it. Roger saw the beauty of his face that looked as if it had been picked, like a flower, by those large hands, thick and covered with powdery dust, their palms illuminated now by a delicate and trembling flame.

• • •

*They say that the murderer Ménesclou used a spray of lilacs to entice the little girl closer to him so that he could then slit her throat; it is with his hair, with his eyes—with his full smile—that He (Querelle) draws me on. Does this mean that I am going to my death? That those locks, those teeth are lethal? Does it mean that love is a murderer's lair? And could it mean that "He" is leading me on? And "for that"?*

*At the point of my going under, "in Querelle," will I still be able to reach the alarm siren?*

*(While the other characters are incapable of lyricism which we are using in order to recreate them more vividly within you, Lieutenant Seblon himself is solely responsible for what flows from his pen.)*

*I would love it—oh, I deeply wish for it!—if, under his regal garb, "He" were simply a hoodlum! To throw myself at his feet! To kiss his toes!*

*In order to find "Him" again, and counting on absence and the emotions aroused by returning to give me courage to address "Him" by his first name, I pretended to be leaving on a long furlough. But I wasn't able to resist. I come back. I see "Him" again, and I give "Him" my orders, almost vindictively.*

*He could get away with anything. Spit me in the face, call me by my first name.*

*"You're getting overly familiar!" I'd say to "Him."*

*The blow he would strike me with his fist, right in the mouth,*

would make my ears ring with this oboe murmur: "My vulgarity is regal, and it accords me every right."

By giving the ship's barber a curt order to clip his hair very short, Lieutenant Seblon hoped to achieve a he-mannish appearance—not so much to save face as to be able to move more freely among the handsome lads. He did not know, then, that he caused them to shrink back from him. He was a well-built man, wide-shouldered, but he felt within himself the presence of his own femininity, sometimes contained in a chickadee's egg, the size of a pale blue or pink sugared almond, but sometimes brimming over to flood his entire body with its milk. He knew this so well that he himself believed in this quality of weakness, this frailty of an enormous, unripe nut, whose pale white interior consisted of the stuff children call milk. The Lieutenant knew to his great chagrin that this core of femininity could erupt in an instant and manifest itself in his face, his eyes, his fingertips, and mark every gesture of his by rendering it too gentle. He took care never to be caught counting the stitches of any imaginary needlework, scratching his head with an imaginary knitting needle. Nevertheless he betrayed himself in the eyes of all men whenever he gave the order to pick up arms, for he pronounced the word "arms" with such grace that his whole person seemed to be kneeling at the grave of some beautiful lover. He never smiled. His fellow officers considered him stern and somewhat puritanical, but they also believed they were able to discern a quality of stupendous refinement underneath that hard shell, and the belief rested on the way in which, despite himself, he pronounced certain words.

*The happiness of clasping in my arms a body so beautiful, even though it is huge and strong! Huger and stronger than mine.*

Reverie. Is this him? "He" goes ashore every night. When he comes back, "His" bell-bottom pants—which are wide, and cover his shoes, contrary to regulations—look bespattered, perhaps with jism mixed with the dust of the streets he has been sweeping with their frayed bottoms. His pants, they're the dirtiest sailor's pants I've ever seen. Were I to demand an explanation from "Him," "He" would smile as he chucked his beret behind him: "That, that's just from all the suckers going down on me. While they're giving me a blowjob, they come all over my jeans. That's just their spunk. That's all."

"He" would appear to be very proud of it. "He" wears those stains with a glorious impudence: they are his medals.

While it is the least elegant of the brothels in Brest, where no men of the Battle Fleet ever go to give it a little of their grace and freshness, La Féria certainly is the most renowned. It is a solemn gold and purple cave providing for the colonials, the boys of the Merchant Navy and the tramp steamers, and the longshoremen. Whereas the sailors visit to have a "piece" or a "short time," the dock workers and others say: "Let's go shoot our wads." At night, La Féria also provides the imagination with the thrills of scintillating criminality. One may always suspect three or four hoodlums lurking in the fog-shrouded *pissoir* erected on the sidewalk across the street. Sometimes the front door stands ajar, and from it issue the airs of a player piano, blue strains, serpentines of music unrolling in the dark shadows, curling round the wrists and necks of the workmen who just happen to be walking past. But daylight allows a more detailed view of the dirty, blind, gray and shame-ravaged shack it is. Seen only by the light of its lantern and its lowered Venetian blinds, it could well be overflowing with the hot

luxury of a bounty of boobs and milky thighs under clinging black satin, bursting with bosoms, crystals, mirrors, scents, and champagne, the sailor's dreams as soon as he enters the red-light quarter. It had a most impressive door. This consisted of a thick slab of wood, plated over with iron and armed with long, sharp spikes of shining metal—perhaps steel—pointing outward, into the street. In its mysterious arrogance it was perfectly suited to heighten the turmoil of any amorous heart. For the docker or stevedore the door symbolized the cruelty that attends the rites of love. If the door was designed for protection, it had to be guarding a treasure such as only insensate dragons or invisible genies could hope to gain without being impaled to bleed on those spikes—unless, of course, it did open all by itself, to a word, a gesture from you, docker or soldier, for this night the most fortunate and blameless prince who may inherit the forbidden domains by power of magic. To be so heavily protected, the treasure had to be dangerous to the rest of the world, or, again, of such a fragile nature that it needed to be protected by the means employed in the sheltering of virgins. The long-shoreman might smile and joke about the sharp spear-tips pointing at him, but this did not prevent his becoming, for a moment, the man who penetrates—by the charm of his words, his face, or his gestures—a palpitating virginity. And from the very threshold, even though he was far from a true hard-on, the presence of his prick would make itself felt in his pants, still soft perhaps, but reminding him, the conqueror of the door, of his prowess by a slight contraction near the tip that spread slowly to the base and on to the muscles of his buttocks. Within that still flabby prick the docker would be aware of the presence of another, minuscule, rigid prick, something like the “idea” of horniness. And it would be a solemn moment, from the contemplation of the spikes to the sound of bolts slamming shut behind him. For Madame Lysiane the door had other virtues. When closed, it transformed her, the lady of the house, into an oceanic pearl contained in the nacre of an oyster that

was able to open its valve, and to close it, at will. Madame Lysiane was blessed with the gentleness of a pearl, a muffled gleam emanating less from her milky complexion than from her innate sense of tranquil happiness illuminated by inner peace. Her contours were rounded, shiny, and rich. Millennia of slow attrition, of numerous gains and numerous losses, a patient economy, had gone into the making of this plenitude. Madame Lysiane was certain that she was sumptuousness personified. The door guaranteed that. The spikes were ferocious guardians, even against the very air. The lady of La Féria passed her life in a leisurely time, in a medieval castle, and she saw it often in her mind's eye. She was happy. Only the most subtle elements of the life outside found their way to her, to anoint her with an exquisite ointment. She was noble, haughty, and superb. Kept away from the sun and the stars, from games and dreams, but nourished by her very own sun, her own stars, her own games and dreams, shod in mules with high Louis Quinze heels, she moved slowly among her girls without so much as touching them, she climbed the stairs, walked along corridors hung with gilt leather, through astounding halls and salons we shall attempt to describe, sparkling with lights and mirrors, upholstered, decorated with artificial flowers in cut-glass vases and with erotic etchings on the walls. Moulded by time, she was beautiful. Robert had now been her lover for six months.

“You pay cash?”

“I told you so already.”

Querelle was petrified by Mario's stare. That stare and his general demeanor expressed more than indifference: they were icy. In order to appear to ignore Mario, Querelle deliberately looked only at the brothelkeeper, looked him straight in the eye. His own immobility was making him feel awkward too. He regained a little assurance when he had shifted his weight from one foot to the other; a modicum of suppleness returned to his

body, just as he was thinking: "Me, I'm only a sailor. My pay's all I've got. So I've got to hustle. Nothing wrong with that. It's good shit I'm talking about. He's got nothing on me. And even if that one is a cop, I don't give a shit." But he felt that he wasn't able to make a dent in the proprietor's imperturbability: he showed hardly any interest in the merchandise offered, and none at all in the person offering it. The lack of movement and the almost total silence among these three characters was beginning to weigh on each one of them. Querelle went on, in his mind: "I haven't told him that I'm Bob's brother. All the same, he wouldn't dare put the finger on me." At the same time he was appreciating the proprietor's tremendous build and the good looks of the cop. Until now, he had never experienced any real rivalry in the male world, and if he was not all that impressed by what he was confronted with in these two men—or unaware of his feelings in terms of such phraseology—he was at least suffering, for the first time, from the indifference of men toward him. So he said:

"And there's no heat on, is there?"

It had been his intention to demonstrate his contempt for the fellow who kept on staring at him, but he did not care to define that contempt too pointedly. He did not even dare so much as indicate Mario to the boss with his eyes.

"Dealing with me you don't have to worry. You'll get your dough. All you've got to do is bring those five kilos here, and you'll receive your pennies. OK? So get cracking."

With a very slow, almost imperceptible movement of the head the boss nodded toward the counter against which Mario was leaning.

"That's Mario, over there. Don't worry about him, he belongs to the family."

Without one twitch of his face muscles, Mario held out his hand. It was hard, solid, armored rather than ornamented with three gold rings. Querelle's waist was trimmer than Mario's, by an inch or so. He knew that the very moment he set eyes on the

splendid rings: they seemed to be signs of great masculine strength. He had no doubt that the realm over which this character lorded it was a terrestrial one. Suddenly, and with a twinge of melancholy, Querelle was reminded that he possessed, hidden forr'ard in the soaking despatch-boat out in the Roads, all it needed to be this man's equal. The thought calmed him down a little. But was it really possible for a policeman to be so handsome, so wealthy? And was it possible that he would join forces with, no, join his beauty to the power of an outlaw (because that is what Querelle liked to think the brothelkeeper was)? But that thought, slowly unfolding in Querelle's mind, did not set it at rest, and his disdain yielded to his admiration.

"Hello."

Mario's voice was large and thick like his hands—except that it carried no sparkle. It struck Querelle slap in the face. It was a brutal, callous voice, like a big shovel. Speaking of it, a few days later, Querelle said to the detective: "Your pound of flesh, every time you hit me in the face with it . . ." Querelle gave him a broad smile and held out his hand, but without saying anything. To the proprietor he said:

"My brother isn't coming, is he?"

"Haven't seen him. Dunno where he is."

Afraid that he might seem tactless and rile the boss, Querelle did not pursue the question. The main parlor of the brothel was silent and empty. It seemed to be recording their meeting, quietly, attentively. It was three o'clock in the afternoon, the ladies would be having their meal in the "refectory." There was no one about. On the second floor, in her room, Madame Lysiane was doing her hair by the light of a single bulb. The mirrors were vacant, pure, amazingly close to the unreal, having nobody and nothing to reflect. The boss tilted and drained his glass. He was a formidably husky man. If he had never been really handsome, in his youth he had no doubt been a fine specimen, despite the blackheads, the hair-thin black wrinkles on his neck, and the pockmarks. His pencil-line mustache,

trimmed "American style," was undoubtedly a souvenir of 1918. Thanks to those doughboys, to the Black Market, and to the traffic in women he had been able to get rich quick and to purchase *La Féria*. His long boat trips and fishing parties had tanned his skin. His features were hard, the bridge of his nose firm, the eyes small and lively, the pate bald.

"What time d'you think you'll get here?"

"I'll have to get organized. Have to get the bag out of there. No problem, though. I've got it figured out."

With a flicker of suspicion, glass in hand, the boss looked at Querelle. "Yeah? But, make no mistake, you're on your own. It's none of my business."

Mario remained motionless, almost absent: he was leaning against the counter with his back reflected in the mirror behind him. Without a word he removed his elbows from the counter, thus changing his interesting posture, and went to the big mirror next to the proprietor: now it looked as if he were leaning against himself. And now, faced with both men, Querelle experienced a sudden malaise, a sinking of the heart, such as killers know. Mario's calmness and good looks disconcerted him. They were on too grand a scale. The brothelkeeper, Norbert, was far too powerful-looking. So was Mario. The outlines of their two bodies met to form one continuous pattern, and this seemed to blur and blend their muscular bodies as well as their faces. It was impossible, the boss couldn't be an informer; but then it seemed equally out of the question for Mario to be anything but a cop. Within himself, Querelle felt a trembling, a vacillation, almost to the point of losing himself, by vomiting it all out, all that he really was. Seized by vertigo in the presence of these powerful muscles and nerves that he perceived as towering above him—as one might when throwing one's head back to appraise the height of a giant pine tree—that kept on doubling and merging again, crowned by Mario's beauty, but dominated by Norbert's bald head and bullish neck,

Querelle stood there with his mouth half-open, his palate a little dry.

"No, sure, that's all right. I'll take care of all that."

Mario was wearing a very plainly cut double-breasted maroon suit, with a red tie. Like Querelle and Nono (Norbert), he was drinking white wine, but like a true cop he seemed completely disinterested in their conversation. Querelle recognized the authority in the man's thighs and chest, the sobriety of movement that endows a man with total power: this, again, stemming from an undisputed moral authority, a perfect social organization, a gun, and the right to use it. Mario was one of the masters. Once more Querelle held out his hand, and then, turning up the collar of his peacoat, he headed for the back door: it was indeed better to leave through the small yard at the back of the house.

"So long."

Mario's voice, as we have observed, was loud and impassive. On hearing it, Querelle felt reassured in some strange way. As soon as he left the house he compelled himself to be aware of his attire, his sailor's attributes: above all, of the stiff collar of the peacoat, which he felt protected his neck like armor. Within its seemingly massive enclosure he could feel how delicate his neck was, yet strong and proud, and at the base of that neck, the tender bones of the nape, the perfect point of vulnerability. Flexing his knees lightly he could feel them touching the fabric of his pants. Querelle was stepping out like a true sailor who sees himself as one hundred per cent just that, a sailor. Rolling the shoulders, from left to right, but not excessively. He thought of hitching the coat up a bit and putting his hands in the vertical front pockets, but changed his mind and instead raised a finger to his beret and pushed it to the back of his head, almost to the nape of his neck, so that its edge brushed against the upturned collar. Such tangible certainty of being every inch a sailor reassured him and calmed him down.



Nevertheless, he felt sad, and mean. He was not wearing that habitual smile. The fog dampened his nostrils, refreshed his eyelids and his chin. He was walking straight ahead, punching his weighty body through the softness of the fog. The greater the distance he put between himself and La Féria, the more he fortified himself with all the might of the police force, believing himself to be under their friendly protection now, and endowing the idea of "police" with the muscular strength of Nono, and with Mario's good looks. This had been his first encounter with a police officer. So he had met a cop, at last. He had walked up to him. He had shaken hands with him. He had just signed an agreement that would protect both of them against treachery. He had not found his brother there, but instead of him those two monsters of certainty, those two big shots. Nevertheless, while gaining strength from the might of the Police as he drew away from La Féria, he did not for one moment cease to be a sailor. Querelle, in some obscure way, knew that he was coming close to his own point of perfection: clad in his blue garb, cloaked in its prestige, he was no longer a simple murderer, but a seducer as well. He proceeded down the Rue de Siam with giant strides. The fog was chilling. Increasingly the forms of Mario and Nono merged and instilled in him a feeling of submission, and of pride—for deep down the sailor in him strongly opposed the policeman: and so he fortified himself with the full might of the Fighting Navy, as well. Appearing to be running after his own form, ever about to overtake it, yet in pursuit, he walked on fast, sure of himself, with a firm stride. His body armed itself with cannon, with a hull of steel, with torpedoes, with a crew who were agile and strong, bellicose and precise. Querelle became "Le Querelle," a giant destroyer, warlord of the seas, an intelligent and invincible mass of metal.

"Watch your step, you asshole!"

His voice cut through the fog like a siren in the Baltic.

"But it was you who . . ."

Suddenly the young man, polite, buffeted, thrown aside by the wake of Querelle's impassive shoulder, realized that he was being insulted. He said:

"At least you could be civil about it! Or open your eyes!"

If he meant "Keep your eyes open," for Querelle the message was "Light up the course, use your running light." He spun around:

"What about my lights?"

His voice was harsh, decisive, ready for combat. He was carrying a cargo of explosives. He didn't recognize himself any more. He hoped to appeal to Mario and Norbert—no longer to that fantastic compound creature that consisted of the sum of their virtues—but in reality he had placed himself under the protection of that very idol. However, he did not yet admit this to himself, and for the first time in his life he invoked the Navy.

"Lookahere, buddy, I hope you ain't trying to get my goat, or are you? Because, let me tell you, us sailors won't let anybody get away with that kind of shit. Understand?"

"But I'm not trying to do anything, I was just passing . . ."

Querelle looked at him. He felt safe in his uniform. He clenched his fists and immediately knew that every muscle, every nerve was taking up its battle station. He was strong, ready to pounce. His calves and arms were vibrating. His body was flexed for a fight in which he would measure up to an adversary—not this young man intimidated by his nerve—but to the power that had subjugated him in the brothel parlor. Querelle did not know that he wanted to do battle for Mario, and for Norbert, the way one would do battle for a king's daughter and against the dragons. This fight was a trial.

"Don't you know you can't push us around, not us Navy guys?"

Never before had Querelle applied such a label to himself. Those sailors proud of being sailors, animated by the *esprit de corps*, had always seemed comical to him. In his eyes they were

as ridiculous as the bigheads who played to the gallery and then got shown up for the braggarts they were. Never had Querelle said, "Me, I'm one of the guys from the *Vengeur*." Or even, "Me, I'm a *French salt* . . ." But now, having done so, he felt no shame; he felt completely at ease.

"OK, scram."

He pronounced these words with a twisted sneer directed right at the landlubber, and with his face fixed in that expression he waited, hands in pockets, until the young man had turned and gone. Then, feeling good and even a little tougher than before, he continued on down the Rue de Siam. Arriving on board Querelle instantly perceived an opportunity for the dispensation of rough justice. He was seized by sudden and violent fury on noticing that one of the sailors on the larboard deck was wearing his beret the very same way he thought Querelle alone should wear it. He felt positively robbed, when he recognized that particular angle, that lock of hair sticking up like a flame, licking the front of the beret, the whole effect of it as legendary, now, as the white fur bonnet worn by Vacher, the killer of shepherds. Querelle walked up, his cruel eyes fixed on those of the hapless sailor, and told him, in a matter-of-fact tone:

"Put it on straight."

The other one did not understand. A little taken aback, vaguely frightened, he stared at Querelle without budging. With a sweep of his hand Querelle sent the beret flying down on to the deck, but before the sailor could bend down to pick it up, Querelle pounded his face with his fists, rapidly, and with a vengeance.

Querelle loved luxury. It seems obvious that he had a feeling for the common beliefs, that he did glory in his Frenchness, to some extent, and in being a Navy man, susceptible like any male to national and military pride. Yet we have to remember some facts of his early youth, not because these extend across the entire psyche of our hero, but in order to make plausible an

attitude that does not boil down to a simple matter of choice. Let us consider his characteristic manner of walking. Querelle grew up among hoodlums, and that is a world of most studied attitudes, round about the age of fifteen—when you roll your shoulders quite ostentatiously, keep your hands thrust deep into your pockets, wear your pants too tight and turned up at the bottoms. Later on he walked with shorter steps, legs tight and the insides of his thighs rubbing against each other, but holding his arms well away from his body, making it appear that this was due to overdeveloped biceps and dorsals. It was only shortly after he committed his first murder that he arrived at a gait and posture peculiar to himself: he stalked slowly, both arms stiffly extended, fists clenched in front of his fly, not touching it; legs well apart.

This search for a posture that would set him, Querelle, apart, and thus prevent him from being mistaken for any other member of the crew, originated in a kind of terrifying dandyism. As a child he had used to amuse himself with solitary competitions with himself, trying to piss ever higher and farther. Querelle smiled, contracting his cheeks. A sad smile. One might have called it ambiguous, intended for the giver rather than the receiver. Sometimes, in thinking about it, the image, the sadness Lieutenant Seblon must have seen in that smile, could be compared to that of watching, in a group of country choirboys, the most virile one, standing firm on sturdy feet, with sturdy thighs and neck, and chanting in a masculine voice the canticles to the Blessed Virgin. He puzzled his shipmates, made them uneasy. First, because of his physical strength, and secondly by the strangeness of his overly vulgar behavior. They watched him approaching, on his face the slight anguish of a sleeper under a mosquito net who hears the complaint of a mosquito held back by the netting and incensed by the impenetrable and invisible resistance. When we read ". . . his whole physiognomy had its changeable aspects: from the ferocious it could turn gentle, often ironic: his walk was a

sailor's, and standing up, he always kept his legs well apart. This murderer had traveled a great deal . . .," we know that this description of Campi, beheaded April 30, 1884, fits like a glove. Being an interpretation, it is exact. Yet his mates were able to say of Querelle: "What a funny guy," for he presented them, almost daily, with another disconcerting and scandalous vision of himself. He shone among them with the brightness of a true freak. Sailors of our Fighting Navy exhibit a certain honesty which they owe to the sense of glory that attracts them to the service. If they wanted to go in for smuggling or any other form of trafficking they would not really know how to go about it. Heavily and lazily, because of the boredom inherent in their task, they perform it in a manner that seems to us like an act of faith. But Querelle kept his eye on the main chance. He felt no nostalgia for his time as a petty hoodlum—he had never really outgrown it—but he continued, under the protection of the French flag, his dangerous exploits. All his early teens he had spent in the company of dockers and merchant seamen. He knew their game.

Querelle strode along, his face damp and burning, without thinking about anything in particular. He felt a little uneasy, haunted by the unformulated glimmer of a suspicion that his exploits would gain him no glory in the eyes of Mario and Nono, who themselves were (and were for each other) glory personified. On reaching the Recouvrance bridge he went down the steps to the landing stage. It was then that it occurred to him, while passing the Customs House, that he was letting his six kilos of opium go too cheap. But then again it was important to get business off to a good start. He walked to the quayside to wait for the patrol boat that would come to return seamen and officers to the *Vengeur* which was lying at anchor out in the Roads. He checked his watch: ten of four. The boat would be there in ten minutes. He took a turn up and down to keep

warm, but chiefly because the shame he felt forced him to keep on the move. Suddenly he found himself at the foot of the wall supporting the coastal road that circles the port, and from which springs the main arch of the bridge. The fog prevented Querelle from seeing the top of the wall, but judging by its slope and the angle at which it rose from the ground, from the size and quality of its stones—details he was quick to observe—he guessed that it was of considerable height. The same sinking of the heart he had felt in the presence of the two men in the brothel upset his stomach a little and tightened his throat. But even though his obvious, even brutal physical strength appeared subject to one of those weaknesses that cause one to be called "delicate," Querelle would never dare to acknowledge such frailty—by leaning against the wall, for example: but the distressing feeling that he was about to be engulfed did make him slump a little. He walked away from the wall, turned his back on it. The sea lay in front of him, shrouded in fog.

"What a strange guy," he thought, raising his eyebrows.

Stock-still, legs wide apart, he stood and pondered. His lowered gaze traveled over the gray miasma of the fog and came to rest on the black, wet stones of the jetty. Little by little, but at random, he considered Mario's various peculiarities. His hands. The curve—he had been staring at it—from the tip of his thumb to the tip of the index finger. The thickness of his arms. The width of his shoulders. His indifference. His blond hair. His blue eyes. Norbert's mustache. His round and shiny pate. Mario again, one of whose fingernails was completely black, a very beautiful black, as if lacquered. There are no black flowers; yet, at the end of his crushed finger, that black fingernail looked like nothing so much as a flower.

"What are you doing here?"

Querelle jumped to salute the vague figure that had appeared in front of him. First and foremost, he saluted the severe voice that pierced the fog, with all the assurance emanating from a place that was light and warm and real, framed in gold.

"Under orders to report to the Naval Police, Lieutenant."

The officer came closer.

"You're ashore?"

Querelle held himself to attention but contrived to hide, under his sleeve, the wrist on which he was wearing the gold watch.

"You'll take the next boat back. I want you to take an order to the Paymaster's Office."

Lieutenant Seblon scrawled a few words on an envelope and gave it to the seaman. He also gave him, in too dry a tone of voice, a few commonplace instructions. Querelle heard the tension in his voice. His smile flickered over a still trembling upper lip. He felt both uneasy at the officer's unexpectedly early return and pleased about it; pleased, above all, at meeting him there, after emerging from a state of panic—the ship's Lieutenant, whose steward he was.

"Go."

Only this word the Lieutenant pronounced with regret, without that customary harshness, even without the serene authority that a firm mouth ought to have given it. Querelle cracked a cautious smile. He saluted and headed toward the Customs House, then once again ascended the steps to the main road. That the Lieutenant should have caught him unawares, before there was time for recognition, was deeply wounding: it ripped open the opaque envelope which, he liked to believe, hid him from men's view. It then worked its way into the cocoon of daydreams he had been spinning the past few minutes, and out of which he now drew this thread, this visible adventure, conducted in the world of men and objects, already turning into the drama he half suspected, much as a tubercular person tastes the blood in his saliva, rising in his throat. Querelle pulled himself together: he had to, to safeguard the integrity of that domain into which even the highest-ranking officers were not permitted any insight. Querelle rarely responded even to the most distant familiarity. Lieutenant

Seblon never did anything—whether he thought he did, or not—to establish any familiarity with his steward; such were the excessive defenses the officer armored himself with. While making Querelle smile, he left it to him to take any step toward intimacy. As bad luck would have it, such awkward attempts only served to put Querelle out. A few moments ago he had smiled because his Lieutenant's voice had been a reassuring sound. Now a sense of danger made the old Querelle bare his teeth. He had gone off with a gold watch from the Lieutenant's cabin drawer, but it was only because he had believed that the Lieutenant had really departed on a long furlough.

"When he gets back, he'll have forgotten all about it," had been his reasoning. "He'll think he lost it some place."

As he climbed the steps Querelle let his hand drag along the iron guard rail. The image of the two guys at the brothel, Mario and Norbert, suddenly flashed back to his mind. An informer and a cop. The fact that they had not denounced him immediately made it even more terrifying. Perhaps the police forced them to act as double agents. The image of the two grew larger. Grown monstrous, it threatened to devour Querelle. And the Customs? It was impossible to get round the Customs. Again the same nausea that had previously deranged his innards: now it culminated in a hiccup that did not quite reach his mouth. Slowly he regained his calm, and as soon as it spread throughout his body he realized that he was home free. A few more steps, and he would be sitting down up there on the top step, by the side of the road. He might even take a little nap, after such a wonderful brainstorm. From this moment on he forced himself to think in precise terms:

"Boy, that's it! I've got it. What I need is some guy (Vic was the man, he'd already decided), a guy to let down a piece of string from the top of that wall. I get off the boat and hang around on the jetty for a while. Fog's thick enough. Instead of going on, past the Customs, I'll stay at the foot of the wall. And up there, on the road, there's that guy holding the string. Need

about ten, twelve meters of it. Then I tie the package to it. The fog'll hide me. My buddy pulls it up, and I walk through Customs, clean as a whistle."

He felt deeply relieved. The emotion was identical with the one he felt as a child at the foot of one of the two massive towers that rise in the port of La Rochelle. It was a feeling of both power and the lack of it: of pride, in the first place, to know that such a tall tower could be the symbol of his own virility, to the extent that when he stood at the base of it, legs apart, taking a piss, he could think of it as his own prick. Coming out from the movies in the evening he would sometimes crack jokes with his buddies, standing there, taking a leak in the company of two or three of them:

"Now that's what Georgette needs!"

or:

"With one like that in my pants I could have all the pussy in La Rochelle,"

or:

"You're talking like some old guy! Some old Rochellois!"

But when he was by himself, at night or during the day, opening or buttoning his fly, his fingers felt they were capturing, with the greatest care, the treasure—the very soul—of this giant prick; he imagined that his own virility emanated from the stone phallus, while feeling quietly humble in the presence of the unruffled and incomparable power of that unimaginably huge male. And now Querelle knew he would be able to deliver his burden of opium to that strange ogre with the two magnificent bodies.

"Just need to get another guy to help. Can't do it without him."

Querelle understood, though hazily, that the entire success of the venture depended on this one sailor, and (even more vaguely, in the peace of mind afforded by this very remote and sweet idea, yet as insubstantial as the dawn), in fact, on Vic—

whom he would enroll for the job, and it would be through him that he would be able to reach Mario and Norbert.

Now the boss seemed straight; the other one was too handsome to be a mere cop. Those rings were too nice for that.

"And what about me? And my jewels? If only that sonofabitch could see them!"

Querelle was referring to the treasure hidden away in the despatch-boat, but also to his balls, full and heavy, which he stroked every night, and kept safely tucked away between his hands while he slept. He thought of the stolen watch. He smiled: that was the old Quercelle, blooming, lighting up, showing the delicate underside of his petals.

The workmen went and sat down at a bare wooden table in the middle of the dormitory, between the two rows of beds. On it stood two large, steaming bowls of soup. Slowly Gil took his hand off the fur of the cat lying stretched on his knee; then put it back there. Some small part of his shame was flowing out into the animal and being absorbed by her. Thus, she was a comfort to Gil, like a dressing staunching a wound. Gil had not wanted to get into a fight when, on coming back, Theo had started poking fun at him. And that had been obvious from his tone of voice, so surprisingly humble when answering: "There's some words better left unsaid." As his retorts were usually dry and laconic, almost to the point of cruelty, Gil had been all the more conscious of his humiliation when he heard his own voice ingratiate itself, stretch out like a shadow round Theo's feet. To himself, to console his self-regard, Gil had remarked that one does not fight with such assholes, but the spontaneous sweetness of his voice reminded him too strongly that he had, in fact, given in. And his buddies? What the hell did they matter, fuck'em. Theo, that was well known, Theo was a queer. He was tough and nery all right, but he was a queer. No sooner had

Gil started to work in the shipyard than the mason had showered him with his attentions, favors which sometimes were real masterpieces of subtlety. He also bought Gil glasses of the syrupy white wine in the bistros of Recouvrance. But within that steely hand slapping him on the back in the bar Gil sensed—and trembled at sensing—the presence of another, softer hand. The one wanted to subjugate him, so that the other could then caress him. The last couple of days Theo had been trying to make him angry. It riled him that he had not yet had his way with the younger man. In the shipyard Gil would sometimes look across at him: it was rare not to find Theo's gaze fixed on him. Theo was a scrupulous workman, regarded as exemplary by all his mates. Before placing it in its bed of cement, his hands caressed each stone, turned it over, chose the best-looking surface, and always fitted it so that the best side faced outward. Gil raised his hand, stopped stroking the cat. He put it down gently, next to the stove, on a soft spot covered with shavings. Thus he perhaps made his companions believe that he was a very sweet-tempered man. He even wanted his gentleness to be provoking. Finally, for his own benefit, he had to give the appearance of wishing to distance himself from any excessive reaction induced by Theo's insult. He went to the table, sat down at his place. Theo did not look at him. Gil saw his thick mop of hair and thick neck bent over the white china bowl. He was talking and laughing heartily with one of his friends. The overall sound was one of mouths lapping up spoonfuls of thick soup. Once the meal was finished, Gil was the first one to get up; he took off his sweater and went to work on the dirty dishes. For a few minutes, his shirt open at the neck, sleeves rolled up above elbows, his face reddened and damp from the steam, his bare arms plunging into the greasy dishwater, he looked like a young female kitchen worker in some restaurant. He knew, all of a sudden, that he was no longer just an ordinary workman. For several minutes he felt he had turned into a strange and ambiguous being: a young man

who acted as a serving maid to the masons. To prevent any of them coming up to tease her, to smack her on the buttocks with great gusts of laughter, he made sure all his motions were brisk and busy. When he took his hands out of the now revoltingly tepid water, they no longer appeared soft like that at all—you could see the ravages wrought by plaster and cement. He felt some regret at the sight of these workman's hands, their cracked skin, their permanent white frosting, their fingernails crusted with cement. Gil had been storing up too much shame over the last couple of days to even dare think about Paulette at this point. Nor about Roger, either. He was unable to think of them warmly; his feelings had been soiled by shame, by a kind of nauseating vapor that threatened to mingle with all his thoughts in order to corrupt and decompose them. Yet he did think of Roger: with hatred. In that atmosphere, the hatred grew more noxious, grew so forcefully that it chased away the feeling of shame, squeezed it, rammed it into the remotest corner of his consciousness; there, however, it squatted brooding and reminding him of its presence with the heavy insistence of a throbbing abscess. Gil hated Roger for being the cause of his humiliation. He hated Roger's good looks, even, for providing Theo with ammunition for his evil sense of irony. He hated Roger for coming down to the shipyard, the previous day. True, he had smiled at him all through an evening, while singing, on a table top—but that was simply because Roger alone knew that the last song was the one Paulette liked to hum, and thus he was addressing her, through an accomplice

*He was a happy bandit,  
Nothing did he fear . .*

Some of the masons were playing cards now on the table cleared of the white china bowls and plates. The stove was going great guns. Gil wanted to go and take a leak, but in turning his head he saw Theo walking across the room and

opening the door, most probably on his way to the same place. Gil stayed where he was. Theo closed the door behind him. He went out into the night and fog, dressed in a khaki shirt and blue pants patched with various faded bits of blue, very pleasing to look at; Gil had a similar pair, and valued them highly. He began to undress. He peeled off his shirt, revealing an undershirt from which his muscles bulged through the wide armholes. With his pants round his ankles, bending down, he saw his thighs: they were thick and solid, well developed by bicycling and playing soccer, smooth as marble and just as hard. In his thoughts Gil let his eyes travel up from his thighs to his belly, to his muscular back, to his arms. He felt ashamed of his strength. Had he taken up the challenge to fight, "on the level" perhaps (no punching, just wrestling) or "no holds barred" (boot and fist), he could certainly have beaten Theo; but that one had a reputation for extreme vindictiveness. Out of sheer rage Theo would have been capable of getting up at night to pad over to Gil's bed and cut his throat. It was thanks to this reputation that he was able to go on insulting others as blithely as he did. Gil refused to run the risk of having his throat cut. He stepped out of his pants. Standing for a moment in front of his bed in his red shorts and white undershirt, he gently scratched his thighs. He hoped that his buddies would observe his muscles and understand that he had only refused to fight out of generosity, so as not to make an older man look like a fool. He got into bed. His cheek on the bolster, Gil thought of Theo with disgust, that feeling growing more intense as he realized that in days past, as a young man, Theo surely had been a very handsome man. He was still pretty vigorous. Sometimes, at work, he would make awkward, punning references to what he thought was the proverbial virility of the men of the building trade. His face, with its hard, manly, still unspoiled features, was covered as with a net of minuscule wrinkles. His dark eyes, small but brilliant, mostly expressed sarcasm, but on certain days Gil had caught them looking at him, overflowing with an

extraordinary tenderness; and that more often than not toward evening, when the gang was getting ready to leave. Theo would be scouring his hands with a little soft sand, and then he would straighten his back to take a good look at the work in progress: at the rising wall, at the discarded trowels, the planks, the wheelbarrows, the buckets. Over all these, and over the workmen, a gray, impalpable dust was settling, turning the yard into a single object, seemingly finished, the result of the day's commotion. The peace of the evening appeared due to this achievement, a deserted yard, powdered a uniform gray. Stiff after their day's work, worn out and silent, the masons would drift off with slow, almost funereal steps. None of them were more than forty years old. Tired, kit bag over left shoulder, right hand in pants pocket, they were leaving the day for the night. Their belts uneasily held up pants made for suspenders; every ten meters they would give them a hitch, tucking the front under the belt while letting the back gape wide, always showing that little triangular flap and its two buttons intended for fastening to a pair of suspenders. In this sluggish calm they would return to their quarters. None of them would be going to the girls or the bistro before Saturday, but, once abed and at peace, they would let their manhood take its rest and under the sheets store up its black forces and white juices; would go to sleep on their side and pass a dreamless night, one bare arm with its powder-dusted hand stretched out over the edge of the bed, showing the delicate pulsation of the blood in bluish veins. Theo would trail along beside Gil. Every evening he offered him a cigarette before setting out to catch up with the others, and sometimes—and then his expression would change—he would give him a great slap on the shoulder.

"Well, buddy? How's it going?"

Gil would reply with his usual, noncommittal shrug. He would barely manage a smile. On the bolster, Gil felt his cheek grow hot. He had lain there with his eyes wide open, and by reason of his ever increasing need to empty his bladder, his

anger was aggravated by impatience. The rims of his eyelids were burning. A blow received straightens a man up and makes the body move forward, to return that blow, or a punch—to jump, to get a hard-on, to dance: to be alive. But a blow received may also cause you to bend over, to shake, to fall down, to die. When we see life, we call it beautiful. When we see death, we call it ugly. But it is more beautiful still to see oneself living at great speed, right up to the moment of death. Detectives, poets, domestic servants and priests rely on abjection. From it, they draw their power. It circulates in their veins. It nourishes them.

“Being a cop’s just a job like any other.”

Giving this answer to the slightly scornful friend of long standing who was asking him why he had joined the police force, Mario knew that he was lying. He did not much care for women, although it was easy for him to get a piece of the action from prostitutes. The fact of Dédé’s presence made the hatred he felt all around him in his life as a policeman seem like a heavy burden. Being a cop embarrassed him. He wanted to ignore the fact, but it enveloped him. Worse, it flowed in his veins. He was afraid of being poisoned by it. Slowly at first, then with increasing force, he became involved with Dédé. Dédé could be the antidote. The Police in his veins circulated a little less strongly, grew weaker. He felt a little less guilty. The blood in his veins was then less black, and this made him a target for the scorn of the hoodlums and the vengeance of Tony.

Was it true that the prison of Bougen was filled with beautiful female spies? Mario kept hoping that he would be called in for a case involving a theft of documents concerning national defense matters.

In Dédé’s room, Rue Saint-Pierre, Mario was sitting, feet on the floor, on the divan bed covered with a plain fringed blue

cotton bedspread pulled over unmade sheets. Dédé jumped on to the bed to kneel beside the immobile profile of Mario’s face and torso. The detective didn’t say anything. Not a muscle in his face moved. Never before had Dédé seen him look so hard, drawn, and sad; his lips were dry and set in a mean expression.

“And now what? What’s going to happen? I’ll go down to the port, take a good look around . . . I’ll see if he’s there. What d’you say?”

Mario’s face remained grim. A strange heat seemed to animate it, without heightening its color; it was pale, but the lines were set so hard and so rigidly drawn and patterned that they lit the face up with an infinity of stars. It looked as if Mario’s whole life were surging upwards, mounting from his calves, parts, torso, heart, anus, guts, arms, elbows, and neck, right up into the face, where it grew desperate at not being able to escape, to go on, to disappear into the night and come to an end in a shower of sparks. His cheeks were a little hollowed, making the chin look firmer. He wasn’t frowning; his eyeballs were slightly protuberant, and his eyelid looked like a small amber rosebud attached to the stem of his nose. In the front of his mouth Mario was rolling around an ever increasing amount of spittle, not daring, not knowing how to swallow it. His fear and his hatred mingled and massed there, at the farthest reaches of himself. His blue eyes looked almost black, under brows which had never appeared so light, so blond. Their very brightness troubled Dédé’s peace of mind. (The boy was far more peaceful than his friend was agitated—profoundly agitated, as if he alone had dredged up to the surface all the mud deposited in both of them; and this new force of purpose in the detective made him look both desperate and grave, with a touch of that restrained irritation so typical a trait in accredited heroes. Dédé seemed to have recognized this and could find no better means of displaying his gratitude than by accepting, with elegant simplicity, his purification, his becoming endowed with the vernal grace of April woodlands.) We were saying—that extreme brightness of



Mario's eyebrows troubled the young fellow, as he saw so light a color casting such shadows, over so dark and stormy an expression. Desolation appears greater when pinpointed by light. And the whiteness of the brows troubled his peace of mind, the purity of it: not because he knew that Mario went in fear of his life because of the return of a certain stevedore he had once arrested, but because he was watching the detective manifest unmistakable signs of acute mental struggle—by making him understand, in some indefinite way, that there was hope of seeing joy return to his friend's face as long as it still showed signs of such brightness. That "ray of light" on Mario's face was, in point of fact, a shadow. Dédé put a bare forearm—his shirtsleeves were rolled up above the elbow—on Mario's shoulder and gazed attentively at his ear. For a moment he contemplated the attractions of Mario's hair, razor-cut from the nape of the neck to the temples: recently cut, it gave off a delicate, silky light. He blew gently on the ear, to free it of some blond hairs, longer ones, that fell from the forehead. None of this caused Mario's expression to change.

"What a drag, you looking so grouchy! What do you think they're going to do, those guys?"

For a couple of seconds he was silent, as if reflecting; then he added:

"And it's really too damn bad you didn't think of having them arrested. Why didn't you?"

He leant back a little way to get a better view of Mario's profile, whose face and eyes did not move. Mario was not even thinking. He was simply allowing his stare to lose itself, to dissolve, and to let his whole body be carried away in this dissolution. Only a short while ago Robert had informed him that five of the most determined characters among the dockers had sworn they'd "get" him. Tony, whom he had arrested in a manner these sons of Brest regarded as unfair, had been released from the prison of Bougen the previous evening.

"What would you like me to do?"

Without shifting his knees, Dédé had managed to lean back even farther. He now had the posture of a young female saint at the very moment of a visitation, fallen on her knees at the foot of an oak tree, crushed by the revelation, by the splendor of Grace, then bending over backwards in order to save her face from a vision that is searing her eyelashes, her very eyeballs, blinding her. He smiled. Gently he put his arm round the detective's neck. With little kisses he pecked at, without ever touching them, his forehead, temples, and eyes, the rounded tip of the nose, his lips, yet always without actually touching them; Mario felt like being subjected to a thousand prickly points of flame, darting and flickering to and fro. He thought:

"He's covering me with mimosa blossoms."

Only his eyelids fluttered, no other part of his body moved, nor did his hands, still resting on his knees, nor did his pecker grow lively. He was, nevertheless, touched by the kid's unaccustomed tenderness. It reached him in a thousand small shocks, sad only in their tentativeness, and warm, and he permitted it slowly to swell and lighten his body. But Dédé was pecking at a rock. The intervals between kisses grew longer, the youngster withdrew his face, still smiling, and started to whistle. Imitating the twitter of sparrows on all sides of Mario's rigid and massive head, from eye to mouth, from neck to nostrils, he moved his small mouth, now shaped like a chicken's ass, whistling now like a blackbird, now like an oriole. His eyes were smiling. He was having a good time, sounding like all the birds in a grove. It made him feel quite soft inside to think that he was all these birds, and that at the same time he was offering them up on this burning but immobile head, locked in stone. Dédé tried to delight and fascinate him with these birds. But Mario felt a kind of anguish, being confronted with that terrifying thing: the smile of a bird. Then, again, he thought with some relief:

"He's powdering me with mimosa blossoms."

Thus, to the birdsong was added a light pollen. Mario felt vaguely like being held captive in one of those fine-meshed widows' veils that are dotted with pea-sized black knots. Then he retired into himself to regain that region of flux and innocence that can be called limbo. In his very anguish he escaped from his enemies. He had the right to be a policeman, a copper. He had a right, to let himself slip back into the old complicity that united him with this little sixteen-year-old stoolie. Dédé was hoping that a smile might open that head, to let the birds in: but the rock refused to smile, to flower, to be covered with nests. Mario was closing up. He was aware of the kid's airy whistlings, but he was—that part of him that was ever-watchful Mario—so far gone into himself, trying to face up to fear and to destroy it by examining it, that it would take him a while to return as far as his muscles and to make them move again. He felt that there, behind the severity of his face, his pallor, his immobility, his doors, his walls, he was safe. Around him rose the ramparts of The Police Force, and he was protected by all that only apparent strictness. Dédé kissed him on the corner of his mouth, very quickly, then bounded back to the foot of the bed. Perching in front of Mario, he smiled.

"What's happening, for crissakes? You sick, or in love, or what?"

In spite of his desire, he had never even thought of going to bed with Dédé, nor had he ever made the slightest equivocal gesture in that direction. His chiefs and colleagues knew of his association with the kid, who to them was merely an auxiliary nonentity.

Dédé had no answer for Mario's sarcasm, but his smile faded a little, without disappearing altogether. His face was pink.

"You must be out of your gourd."

"Well I haven't hurt you, have I? I just planted a few friendly kisses on you. You've been sitting there scowling long enough. Just trying to cheer you up."

"So I haven't got a right to sit and think things over, eh?"

"But it's such a drag when you're like that. And anyway, how do you know for sure that that Tony's really out to get you . . ."

Mario made an irritated gesture. His mouth hardened.

"You don't think I'm getting cold feet, do you?"

"I didn't say that."

Dédé sounded angry.

"I didn't say that."

He was standing in front of Mario. His voice was hoarse, a little vulgar, deep, with a slight country accent. It was the kind of voice that knows how to talk to horses. Mario turned his head. He looked at Dédé for a couple of seconds. All he would proceed to say during the ensuing scene would be tight-lipped and stern, as if trying to put the full force of his will into his expression, so that the youngster would realize, once and for all, that he, Mario Lambert, inspector of the mobile squad, assigned to the Commissariat of Brest, went in no fear for his future. For a year now he had been working with Dédé who provided him with information on the secret life of the docks and told him about the thefts, the pilfering of coffee, minerals, other goods. The men on the waterfront paid little attention to the kid.

"Get going."

Planted in front of him, feet apart and looking stockier than before, Dédé gazed at the policeman, somewhat sulkily. Then he swiveled round on one foot, keeping his legs extended like a compass, and, in reaching over to the window where his coat was hanging on the hasp, moved his shoulders and chest with surprising speed and strength, displacing the weight of an invisible vault of heaven. For the first time Mario realized that Dédé was strong, that he had grown up into a young man. He felt ashamed about having given in to fear in his presence, but then very quickly retreated into the shell of The Police, which justifies every kind of behavior. The window opened on to a narrow lane. Facing it, on the other side, was the gray wall of a garage. Dédé put on his coat. When he turned around again,

briskly as before, Mario got up and stood in front of him, hands in pockets.

"Now, did you get it straight? No need to go in too close. I've told you, no one suspects that you're in with me, but it's better if you don't let them spot you."

"Don't worry, Mario."

Dédé was getting ready to leave. He wound a red woolen muffler round his neck and put on a small, gray cap, the kind still worn by lads in the villages. He pulled out a cigarette from a number of loose ones in his coat pocket and nimbly popped it into Mario's mouth, then one into his own, without cracking a smile in spite of what it brought to mind. And then, in a suddenly grave, almost solemn fashion, he donned his gloves, the only symbol of his minimal enough affluence. Dédé loved, almost venerated these poor objects and would never just carry them in his hand, but always put them on with great care. He knew that they were the only detail by which he himself, from the depths of his self-imposed—therefore ethical—dereliction, touched upon the world of society and wealth. By these clearly purposeful motions he put himself into his proper place again. It amazed him now that he had dared that kiss, and all the games that had preceded it. Like any other mistake, it made him feel ashamed. Never before had he shown Mario, nor Mario him, any sign of affection. Dédé was serious by nature. In his dealings with the detective, he seriously went about collecting his clues, and reported them as seriously every week in some secluded spot that had been agreed on over the phone. For the first time in his life he had given in to his own imagination.

"Stone cold sober, too," he thought.

In saying that Dédé was a serious person, we do not mean that this was a quality he thought desirable. It was rather that his inherent gravity made it hard for him to ever force himself into a semblance of gaiety. He struck a match and held out the little flame to Mario, with a gravity greater than his ignorance of the rites. Since Mario was the taller, the little fellow offered

up his face at the same time, in all innocence, partly shadowed by the screen of his hands.

"And what are you going to do?"

"Me . . . ? Nothing. What d'you suppose. I'll just be waiting for you to get back."

Once again Dédé looked at Mario. He gazed at him for a couple of seconds, his mouth half-open and dry. "I'm scared," he thought. He took a pull at his cigarette and said: "All right." He turned to the mirror to adjust the peak of his cap, to bend it over a little more to the left. In the mirror he could see the whole room in which he had now lived for over a year. It was small, cold, and on the walls there were some photographs of prize fighters and female movie stars, clipped out of the papers. The only luxury item was the light fixture above the divan: an electric bulb in a pale pink glass tulip. He did not despise Mario for being scared. Quite some time ago he had understood the nobility of self-acknowledged fear, what he called the jitters, or cold feet . . .

Often enough he had been forced to take to his heels in order to escape from some dangerous and armed foe. He hoped that Mario would accept the challenge to fight, having decided himself, should a good occasion arise, to knock off the docker who had just come out of the joint. To save Mario would be to save himself. And it was natural enough for anyone to be scared of Tony the Docker. He was a fierce and unscrupulous brute. On the other hand, it seemed strange to Dédé that a mere criminal should cause The Police to tremble, and for the first time he had his doubts that this invisible and ideal force which he served and behind which he sheltered might just consist of weak humans. And, as this truth dawned on him, through a little crack in himself, he felt both weaker and—strangely enough—stronger. For the first time he was taking thought, and this frightened him a little.

"What about your chief? Haven't you told him?"

"Don't you worry about that. I've told you your job: now get

on with it." Mario dimly feared the boy might betray him. The voice in which he answered showed signs of softening, but he caught himself quickly, even before opening his mouth, and the words came out tough and dry. Dédé looked at his wristwatch.

"It's getting on for four," he said. "It's dark already. And there's some fog rolling in . . . Visibility five meters."

"Well, what are you waiting for?"

Mario's voice was suddenly more commanding. He was the boss. Two quick steps had been quite sufficient to take him across the room and bring him, with the same ease of movement, in front of the mirror, where he combed his hair, and once more became that powerful shadow, raw-boned and muscular, cheerful and young, which corresponded to his proper form, and sometimes to that of Dédé as well. (As he watched Mario approach their meeting place, Dédé sometimes told him, with a grin: "I like what I see, and I'd like to be it," but at other times his pride rebelled against such identification. That, then, was when he would attempt some timid gesture of revolt, but a smile or a concise order would put him right back where he belonged, in Mario's shadow.)

"All right."

He tried to sound tough, but for his own ears only. Stock-still for a second, to prove his absolute independence to himself, he let a puff of smoke drift in the direction of the window at which he was staring; one hand in his pocket he then turned abruptly toward Mario and, looking him straight in the eye, extended his other hand, stiffly, at arm's length.

"So long."

He sounded positively funereal. With a more natural calm, Mario replied:

"So long, buddy. Get back soon as you can."

"And don't you feel too blue. T'ain't worth it."

He stood by the door. He opened it. The few items of clothing hanging from the door hook billowed out, sumptuously,

while the stench from the open latrines on the outside landing penetrated the room. Mario noticed this sudden magnificent swirling of materials. With slight embarrassment he heard himself saying:

"Stop play-acting."

He was moved, but he could not permit himself to be moved. His sensitivity, carefully hidden and not really aware of formal and definitive beauty, but very much so of flashes of what we know only by the name "poetry," sometimes overtook and stunned him for a few seconds: it might be some docker, smiling such a smile as he was pocketing a pinch of tea in the warehouse, under his very eyes, that Mario felt like going on without a word, caught himself hesitating, almost regretting that he was the policeman instead of the thief: this hesitation never lasted long. He had hardly taken a step before the enormity of his behavior struck him. The law and order whose servant he was might be overthrown irreparably. A huge breach had already occurred. They might say he refrained from arresting the thief for purely esthetic reasons. At first his habitual watchdog temper would be checked by the grace of the docker, but once Mario became aware of the working of that charm, it was then obviously out of sheer hatred for the thief's beauty that he finally arrested him.

Dédé turned his head, signaling a last farewell from the corner of his eye, but his friend took this to be a wink of complicity at Dédé's own mirror image. Dédé had scarcely closed the door when he felt his muscles melt, his extremities soften as in the execution of a graceful bow. It was the same feeling he had experienced while playing around Mario's face: he had been overcome by a weakness, quickly restrained, that had awakened in him a longing—his neck already bending forward, languidly—to rest his head on Mario's thick thigh.

"Dédé!"

He opened the door again.

"What is it?"

Mario came toward him, looked him straight in the eye. He said, in a gentle whisper:

"You know I trust you, don't you, buddy?"

Surprise in his eyes, mouth half-open, Dédé looked at the detective without answering, without seeming to understand.

"Come back in for a minute . . ."

Gently Mario drew him into the room and shut the door.

"I know you'll do your best to find out what's going on. But, as I said, I trust you. Nobody must get to know that I am here in your room. All right?"

The detective put his large, gold-beringed hand on the little informer's shoulder, then pulled him close to his chest:

"We've been working together for quite some time now, eh, buddy? Now you're on your own. I count on you."

He kissed him on the side of the head and let him go. This was only the second time since they had gotten to know one another that he had called the boy "buddy." Mario considered this fairly low-class language, but it was effective in sealing their friendship. Dédé took off down the stairs. Natural young tough that he was, it did not take him long to shake off his gloom. He stepped out into the street. Mario had listened to his familiar footfall—bouncy, sure and steady—as he descended the wooden staircase of the miserable little hotel. In two strides, for the room was small and Mario a big man, he was by the window. He pulled aside the thick tulle curtain, yellowed by smoke and dirt. Before him were the narrow street and the wall. It was dark. Tony's power was growing. He was turning into every shadow, every patch of the thickening fog into which Dédé was now plunging.

Querelle jumped ashore from the patrol boat. Other sailors came after him, Vic among them. They were coming from *Le Vengeur*. The boat would be there to take them back on board shortly before eleven. The fog was very dense, so substantial that it seemed as if the day itself had taken on material form.

Having conquered the city, it might well decide to last longer than twenty-four hours. Without saying a word to Querelle, Vic walked off toward the Customs shed through which the sailors passed before ascending the steps that lead up to the level of the road, the quayside, as we have mentioned before, being immediately below. Instead of following Vic, Querelle merged into the fog, heading toward the sea wall. A cunning grin on his face, he waited a moment, then started walking along the wall, running his bare palm over its surface. It did not take long before he felt something brush against his fingers. Taking hold of the string, he tied the end of it round the opium package he had been carrying under his peacoat. He gave the string three sharp little tugs, and up it went, over the wall face, slowly, all the way to Vic.

The Admiral in command of the port was quite shaken the next morning when he was told that a young sailor had been found on the ramparts with his throat cut.

Nowhere had Querelle been seen in Vic's company. In the boat they had not spoken to one another, or certainly not at any length. That same evening, in the shadow of a smokestack, Querelle had given Vic a quick briefing. As soon as Querelle reached the road, he took the ball of string and the package back from Vic. Walking by Vic's side, with the sailor's blue coat sleeve, stiff and heavy from the fog's moisture, brushing against his own, Querelle felt the presence of Murder in every cell of his body. At first this came upon him slowly, a little like the mounting of an amorous affect, and, it seemed, through the same channel—or rather, through the *reverse* of that channel. In order to avoid the city and to enhance the bravado of their venture, Querelle decided to follow the rampart wall. Through the fog, his voice reached Vic:

"Get over here."

They continued along this road as far as the Castle (where

Anne of Brittany once resided), then they crossed the Cours Dajot. No one saw them. They were smoking cigarettes. Querelle was smiling.

"You told nobody, right?"

"Hell, no. I'm not crazy."

The tree-lined walk was deserted. Besides, no one would have thought twice about two sailors coming out of the postern-gate of the rampart road and continuing into the trees, now almost obliterated by the fog, through the brambles, the dead foliage, past ditches and mud, along paths meandering toward some dank thicket. Anyone would have thought they were just two young guys chasing a bit of skirt.

"Let's go round the other side. You see? That way we get around the fort."

Querelle went on smiling, smoking. Vic was matching Querelle's long, heavy stride, and as long as he kept pace with him, he was filled with surprising confidence. Querelle's taciturn and powerful presence instilled in Vic a feeling of authority similar to the one he had experienced the times they had pulled stick-up jobs together. Querelle smiled. He let it rise inside him, that emotion he knew so well, which very soon now, at a good spot, there where the trees stood closer together and where the fog was dense, would take full command of him, driving out all conscience, all inhibition, and would make his body go through the perfect, quick and certain motions of the criminal. He said:

"It's my brother who'll take care of the rest. He's our partner."

"Didn't know he was in Brest, your bro."

Querelle was silent. His eyes became fixed, as if to observe even more attentively the rising of that emotion within him. The smile left his face. His lungs filled with air. He burst. Now he was nothing.

"Yeah, he's in Brest all right. At La Féria."

"La Féria? No kidding! What's he do there? La Féria's a weird kind of joint."

"How so?"

No longer was any part of Querelle present within his body. It was empty. Facing Vic, there was no one. The murderer was about to attain his perfection, because here, in the dark of the night, there now loomed up a group of trees forming a kind of chamber, or chapel, with the path running through it like an aisle. Inside the package containing the opium there were also some pieces of jewelry, once obtained with Vic's assistance.

"Well, you know what they say. You know it as well as I do."

"So what? He's screwing the Madam."

A fraction of Querelle returned to the tips of his fingers, to his lips: the furtive ghost of Querelle once again saw the face and overwhelming presence of Mario combined with Norbert. A wall that had to be dealt with, still, and Querelle paled and dissolved at the foot of it. It had to be scaled, or climbed, or broken through, with a heave of the shoulder.

"Me, too, I've got my jewels," he thought.

The rings and the gold bracelets belonged to him alone. They invested him with sufficient authority to perform a sacred rite. Querelle was now no more than a tenuous breath suspended from his lips and free to detach itself from the body, to cling to the closest and spiciest branch.

"Jewels. That copper, he's covered in jewels. I've got my jewels, too. And I don't show them off."

He was free to leave his body, that audacious scaffolding for his balls. *Their* weight and beauty he knew. With one hand, calmly, he opened the folding knife he had in the pocket of his peacoat.

"Well then the proprietor must've screwed him first."

"And so? If that's his game."

"Shee-it."

Vic sounded shocked.

"If someone proposed that to you, would you say 'sure, go ahead?'"

"Why not, if I felt like it. I've done worse things than that."

A wan smile appeared on Querelle's face.

"If you saw my brother, you'd fall for him. You'd let him do it."

"They say it hurts."

"You bet'cha."

Querelle stopped.

"Smoke?"

The breath, about to be exhaled, flowed back into him who became Querelle once more. Without moving his hand, with a fixed stare, paradoxically directed inward at himself, he saw himself making the sign of the Cross. After that sign, given to warn the audience that the artiste is about to perform a feat of mortal danger, there was no looking back. He had to remain totally attentive in order to go through the motions of murder: he had to avoid any brutal gesture that might surprise the sailor, because Vic most probably wasn't used to being murdered, yet, and might cry out. The criminal has to contend with life and death, both: once they start shouting, one might stick them anywhere. The last time, in Cádiz, the victim had soiled Querelle's collar. Querelle turned to Vic and offered him a cigarette and lighter, with a seemingly awkward gesture hampered by the parcel he was holding under his arm.

"Go head, light one for me too."

Vic turned his back to keep the wind out.

"Yeah, he'd like you, you're such a sweet little kitten. And if you could suck his prick as hard as you're pulling on the old coffin nail, boy he could really swing with that!"

Vic blew out a puff of smoke. Holding out the lighted cigarette to Querelle, he said:

"Well, yeah, I don't think he'd get a chance."

Querelle sniggered.

"Oh, no? And what about me, I wouldn't get a chance either?"

"Oh, come off it . . ."

Vic wanted to move on, but Querelle held him back, stretching out one leg as if to trip him. Baring his teeth, cigarette clamped between them, he went on:

"Hey? Hey . . . Tell me something, ain't I as good as Mario? Ain't I?"

"What Mario?"

"What Mario? Well . . . It's thanks to you that I got over that wall, right?"

"Yeah, so what? What the hell are you driving at?"

"So you don't want to?"

"Come off it, stop horsing around . . ."

Vic would never add anything to that. Querelle grabbed him by the throat, letting his package fall onto the path. As it fell, he whipped out his knife and severed the sailor's carotid artery. As Vic had the collar of his peacoat turned up, the blood, instead of spurting over Querelle, ran down the inside of his coat and over his jersey. His eyes bulging the dying man staggered, his hand moving in a most delicate gesture, letting go, abandoning himself in an almost voluptuous posture that recalled, even in this land of fog, the dulcet clime of the bedchamber in which the Armenian had been murdered—whose image Vic's gesture now recreated in Querelle's memory. Querelle supported him firmly with his left arm and gently lowered him down onto the grass where he expired.

The murderer straightened his back. He was a thing, in a world where danger does not exist, because one is a thing. Beautiful, immobile, dark thing, within whose cavities, the void becoming vocal, Querelle could hear it surge forth to escape with the sound, to surround him and to protect him. Vic was not dead, he was a youth whom that astonishing thing, sonorous and empty, with a mouth half-open and half-hidden, with

sunken, severe eyes, with hair and garments turned to stone, with knees perhaps enveloped in a fleece thick and curled like an Assyrian beard, whom this thing with its unreal fingers, wrapped in fog, had just done to death. The tenuous breath to which Querelle had been reduced was still clinging to the spiky branch of an acacia. Anxiously, it waited. The assassin snorted twice, very quickly, like a prize fighter, and moved his lips so that Querelle might enter, flow into the mouth, rise to the eyes, seep down to the fingers, fill the thing again. Querelle turned his head, gently, not moving his chest. He heard nothing. He bent down to pull out a handful of grass turf to clean the blade of his knife. He thought he was squashing strawberries into freshly whipped cream, wallowing in them. He raised himself up from his crouched position, threw the bunch of bloodstained grass onto the dead man's body, and, after bending down a second time to retrieve his package of opium, resumed his walk under the trees alone. That the criminal at the instant of committing his crime believes that he'll never be caught is a mistaken assumption. He refuses, no doubt, to see the terrible consequences of his act at all clearly, yet he *knows* that the act does condemn him to death. We find the word "analysis" a little embarrassing. There are other ways of uncovering the workings of this self-condemnation. Let us simply call Querelle a happy moral suicide. Unable to know whether he'll be caught or not, the criminal lives in a state of anxiety, which he can only get rid of by negating, that is to say, by expiating his deed. And *that* is to say, by suffering the full penalty (for it would seem that it is the very impossibility of confessing to murders that provokes the panic, the metaphysical or religious terror in the criminal). At the bottom of a dry moat, at the foot of the ramparts, Querelle was leaning against a tree, cut off from the world by fog and night. He had put the knife back in his pocket. His beret he was holding in front of him, with both hands, at the level of his belt, the pompon against his belly. The smile was gone. He was now, in fact, appearing before the

Criminal Court that he made up for himself after every murder. As soon as he had committed the crime, Querelle had felt the hand of an imaginary policeman on his shoulder, and from the site of the slaughter all the way to this desolate place he had walked with a heavy tread, crushed by his appalling fate. After some hundred meters he abandoned the path to plunge in among the trees and brambles and down a slope to the old moat below the battlements girding the city. He had the frightened look and downcast mien of a guilty man under arrest, yet within him the certainty—and this joined him to the policeman, in a shameful yet friendly fashion—that he was a hero. The ground was sloping and covered with thorny shrubs.

"Well, here we go," he thought. And, almost at once: "Yassir, this is it, folks. Back to the worm farm."

When he reached the bottom of the moat, Querelle stopped for a moment. A light wind was stirring the dry, brittle, pointed tips of the grasses, making them rustle quietly. The strange lightness of the sound only made his situation seem more bizarre. He walked on through the fog, still heading away from the scene of the crime. The grass and the wind went on making their gentle noise, soft as the sound of air in an athlete's nostrils, or the step of an acrobat . . . Querelle, now clad in bright blue silk tights, proceeded slowly, his figure moulded by the azure garment, waist accentuated by a steel-studded leather belt. He felt the silent presence of every muscle working in unison with all the others to create the effect of a statue carved out of turbulent silence. Two police officers walked on either side of him, invisible, triumphant and friendly, full of tenderness and cruelty toward their prey. Querelle continued a few more meters, through the fog and the whispering grasses. He was looking for a quiet place, solitary as a cell, sufficiently secluded and dignified to serve as a place of judgment.

"Sure hope they don't pick up my tracks," he thought.

He regretted that he had not simply turned around and walked backwards in his own footsteps, thus raising the grass he



had trodden down. But he perceived, quickly, the absurdity of his fear, while hoping his steps would be so light that every blade of grass would be intelligent enough to stand up again of its own accord. But the corpse surely wouldn't be discovered until later on, in the early morning hours. Yes, it would have to wait for the working men on their way to their jobs: *they* are the ones who come across what criminals leave by the roadside. The foggy weather did not trouble him. He noticed the marshy stench prevailing in the area. The outstretched arms of pestilence enfolded him. He kept on going. For a moment he was afraid a couple of lovers might have come down here among the trees, but this time of the year that seemed quite unlikely. Leaves and grass were damp, and the gaps between the branches interlaced with cobwebs moistened his face with their droplets as he passed through them. For a few seconds, to the astonished eyes of the assassin, the forest appeared most enchanted and lovely, vaulted and girded by hanging creeper plants gilded by a mysterious sun hanging in a sky both dim and clear and of an immensely distant blue, the womb of every dawn. Finally Querelle found himself by the trunk of a huge tree. He went up to it, cautiously walked around it, then leant against it, turning his back to the place of murder where the corpse lay waiting. He took off his beret and held it in the way we have described. Above him, he knew, a tangle of black branches and twigs was penetrating and holding the fog. And from within him rose, up to his waking consciousness, all the details of the charges against him. In the hush of an overheated room brimming with eyes and ears and fiery mouths, Querelle clearly heard the deep and droning and by its very banality most vengeful voice of the Presiding Judge:

"You have brutally slaughtered an accomplice of yours. The motives for this deed are only too evident . . ." (Here the Judge's voice and the Judge himself blurred. Querelle refused to see those motives, to disentangle, to find them in himself. He relaxed his attention to the proceedings and pressed himself

more closely against the tree. The entire magnificence of the ceremonial appeared in his mind's eye, and he saw the Public Prosecutor rising to his feet.)

"We demand the head of this man! Blood calls for blood!"

Querelle was standing in the box. Braced against the tree he extracted further details of this trial in which his head was at stake. He felt good. Intertwining its branches above him, the tree protected him. From far off, he could hear frogs croaking away, but on the whole everything was so calm that the anguish in court suddenly became enhanced by the anguish of loneliness and silence. As the crime itself was the point of departure (total silence, the silence unto death desired by Querelle), they had spun around him (or, rather, it had issued from himself, this tenuous and immaterial extension of death) a thread of silence, to bind him captive. He concentrated more intensely on his vision. He made it more precise. He was there, yet he was not. He was assisting with the projection of that guilty man into the Criminal Court. He was both watching and directing the show. At times the long and pointed reverie was cut across by some clear and practical thought: "There really aren't any stains on me?" or "Supposing there's someone up there on the road . . .," but then a quick smile appeared on his face and drove his fear away. Yet he was not able to pride himself too much on that smile's power to dissipate the gloom: the smile might also bring on the fear, first to one's teeth bared by receding lips, giving birth to a monster whose snout would take on exactly the shape of one's smile, and then that monster would grow inside one, to envelop and inhabit you, ending up being far more dangerous just because of its very nature of a phantom begotten of a smile in the dark. Querelle wasn't smiling much now. Tree and fog protected him against night and retribution. He returned to the courtroom. Sovereign at the foot of the tree, he made his imaginary double go through the stances of fear, rebellion, confidence and terror, shudders, blenchings. Recollections of what he had read came to his aid. He knew there ought

to be an "incident" in the courtroom. His lawyer rose to speak. Querelle wanted to lose consciousness for a moment, to take refuge in the droning in his ears. He felt he ought to delay the closing scene. Finally, the Court reconvened. Querelle felt himself grow pale.

"The Court pronounces the death sentence."

Everything around him disappeared. He himself and the trees shrunk, and he was astonished to find that he was wan and weak with this new turn of events, just as startled as we are when we learn that Weidmann was not a giant who could tower above the tops of cedar trees, but a rather timid young man of waxen and pimply complexion, standing only 1.70 meters tall among the husky police officers. All Querelle was conscious of was his terrible misfortune of being certifiably alive, and of the loud buzzing in his ears.

Querelle shivered. His shoulders were getting a little cold, as were his thighs and feet. He was standing at the base of the tree, beret in hand, packet of opium under his arm, protected by the thick cloth uniform and the stiff collar of his peacoat. He put on his beret. In some indefinite way he sensed that all was not yet finished. He still had to accomplish the last formality: his own execution.

"Gotta do it, I guess!"

Saying "sensed," we intend to convey the kind of premonition one celebrated murderer, a short while after his apparently totally unexpected arrest, meant when he told the judge: "I sensed that I was about to be nabbed . . ." Querelle shook himself, walked a few steps straight ahead, and, using his hands, scrambled back up the slope where the grass was singing. Some branches grazed against his cheeks and hands: it was then that he felt a profound sadness, a longing for maternal caresses, because those thorny branches appeared gentle, velvety with the fog adhering to them, and they reminded him of the soft radiance of a woman's breast. A couple of seconds later he was back again on the path, then on the road, and he re-entered the

city by a different gate from the one he had emerged from with the other sailor. Something seemed to be missing from his side.

"It's dull, with no one to talk to."

He smiled, but very faintly. He was leaving, back there in the fog, on the grass, a certain object, a small heap of calm and night emanating from an invisible and gentle dawn, an object, sacred or damned, waiting at the foot of the outer walls for permission to enter the city, after expiation, after the probationary period imposed for purification and humility. The corpse would have that boring face he knew, all its lines smoothed away. With long, supple strides, that same free and easy, slightly rolling gait that made people say "There's a guy steps like an hombre," Querelle, his soul at peace, took the road leading to La Féria.

*That* episode we wanted to present in slow motion. Our aim was not to horrify the reader, but to give the act of murder something of the quality of an animated cartoon—which in any case is exactly the art form we would most like to be able to use, to show the deformations of our protagonist's musculature and soul. In any case, and in order not to annoy the reader too much—and trusting him to complete, with his very own malaise, the contradictory and twisted windings of our own vision of the murder—there is a great deal we have left out. It would be easy to have the murderer experience a vision of his brother. Or to have him killed by his brother. Or to make him kill or condemn his brother. There are a great number of themes on which one might embroider some revolting tapestry like that. Nor do we want to go on about the secret and obscene desires inhabiting the one going to his death. Vic or Querelle, take your pick. We abandon the reader to this confusion of his innards. But let us consider this: after committing his first murder Querelle experienced a feeling of being dead, that is to say, of existing somewhere in the depths—more exactly, at the

bottom of a coffin; of wandering aimlessly about some trite tomb in some trite cemetery, and there imagining the quotidian lives of the living, who appeared to him curiously senseless since *he* was no longer there to be their pretext, their center, their generous heart. However, his human form, or "fleshy envelope," went on busying itself on the earth's surface, among all those senseless people. And Querelle proceeded to arrange another murder. As no act is perfect to the extent that an alibi could rid us from our responsibility for it, Querelle saw in each crime, be it only a theft, *one* detail which (in his eyes only) became a mistake that might lead to his undoing. To live in the midst of his mistakes gave him a feeling of lightness, of a cruel instability, as he seemed to be flitting from one bending reed to another.

From the time he reached the first lights of the town Querelle had already resumed his habitual smile. When he entered the main parlor of the brothel he was just a husky sailorboy, clear-eyed and looking for some action. He hesitated for a few seconds in the midst of the music, but one of the women lost no time in getting to him. She was tall and blonde, very skinny, wearing a black tulle dress pulled in over the region of her cunt—and hiding it in order to evoke it better—by a triangle of black, longhaired fur, probably rabbit, threadbare and almost worn bald in places. Querelle stroked the fur with a light finger while looking the girl in the eye, but refused to accompany her upstairs.

After delivering the package of opium to Nono and receiving his five thousand francs Querelle knew that the time had come for him to "execute himself."

This would be capital punishment. If a logical chain of events had not brought Querelle to La Féria, the murderer would no doubt have contrived—secretly, within himself—another sacrificial rite. Once more he smiled, looking at the thick nape of the brothelkeeper's neck as that one bent over, on the divan, to examine the opium. He looked at his slightly protruding ears,

the bald and shiny top of his head, the powerful arch of his body. When Norbert looked up again, he confronted Querelle with a face both fleshy and bony, heavy-jowled and broken-nosed. Everything about the man, in his forties, gave an impression of brutal vigor. The head belonged to a wrestler's body, hairy, tattooed perhaps, most certainly odorous. "Capital punishment, for sure."

"Now then. What's your game? What do you want with the Madam? Tell me."

Querelle discarded his grin in order to appear to smile expressly at this question and to wrap up his answer in another smile which this question alone could have provoked—and which this smile alone would succeed in rendering inoffensive. And so, he laughed out loud as he replied, with a free and easy shake of the head and in a tone of voice designed to make it impossible for Nono to take umbrage:

"I like her."

From that moment on Norbert found all the details of Querelle's face totally enchanting. This wasn't the first time a well-built lad had asked for the Madam in order to sleep with the brothelkeeper. One thing intrigued him: which one would get to bugger the other?

"All right."

He pulled out a die from his waistcoat pocket.

"You go? I go?"

"Go ahead."

Norbert bent down and threw the die on the floor. He rolled a five. Querelle took the die. He felt certain of his skill. Nono's well-trained eye noticed that Querelle was going to cheat, but before he could intervene the number "two" was sung out by the sailor, almost triumphantly. For a moment Norbert remained undecided. Was he dealing with some kind of joker? At first he had thought that Querelle was really after his own brother's mistress. This fraudulent trick had proved that was not so. Nor did the guy look like a fruit. Perturbed all the same,

by the anxiety this beast of prey showed in going to its own perdition, he shrugged lightly as he rose to his feet and chuckled. Querelle, too, stood up. He looked around, amused, smiling the more he relished the inner sensation of marching to the torture chamber. He was doing it with despair in his soul, yet with an unexpressed inner certitude that this execution was necessary for him to go on living. Into what would he be transformed? A fairy. He was terrified at the thought. And what exactly is a fairy? What stuff is it made of? What particular light shows it up? What new monster does one become, and how does one then feel about the monstrosity of oneself? One is said to "like that," when one gives oneself up to the police. That copper's good looks were really at the back of everything. It is sometimes said that the smallest event can transform a life, and this one was of such significance.

"No kissing, that's for sure," he thought. And: "I'll just stick my ass out, that's all." That last expression had for him much the same resonance as "I'll stick my prick out."

What new body would be his? To his despair, however, was added the comforting certainty that the execution would wash him clean of the murder, which he now thought of as an indigested morsel of food. At last he would have to pay for that somber feast that death-dealing always is. It is always a dirty business: one has to wash oneself afterwards. And wash so thoroughly that nothing of oneself remains. Be reborn. Die, to be reborn. After that he would not be afraid of anybody. Sure, the police could still track him down and have his head cut off: thus it was necessary to take precautions not to give oneself away, but in front of the fantasy court of justice he had created for himself Querelle would no longer have anything to answer for, since he who committed that murder would be dead. The abandoned corpse, would it get past the city gates? Querelle could hear that long, rigid object, always wrapped in its narrow fog shroud, complaining, murmuring some exquisite tune. It was Vic's dead body, bewailing its fate. It desired the honors of

funeral rites and interment. Norbert turned the key in the lock of the door. It was a big, shiny key, and it was reflected in the mirror opposite the door.

"Take your pants down."

The brothelkeeper's tone was indifferent. Already he had ceased to have any feelings for a guy who interfered with the laws of chance. Querelle remained standing in the middle of the room, his legs wide apart. The idea of women had never bothered him much. Sometimes, at night, in his hammock, his hand would mechanically seek out his prick, caress it, jack off quietly. He watched Nono unbuttoning. There was a moment's silence, and his gaze became fixed on the boss's finger as he was prying one of the buttons out of its buttonhole.

"Well, have you made up your mind?"

Querelle smiled. He began, desultorily, to undo the flap of his sailor's pants. He said:

"You'll take it easy, you hear? They say you can get hurt."

"Well, hell, it won't be the first time . . ."

Norbert sounded dry, almost mean. A flash of anger ran through Querelle's body: he looked extremely beautiful now, with his head held up, shoulders motionless and tense, buttocks tight, hips very straight (drawn in by the strain in the legs that was raising the buttocks), yet of a slimness that enhanced the overall impression of cruelty. Unbuttoned, his flap fell forward over his thighs, like a child's bib. His eyes were glittering. His face, even his hair seemed to be gleaming with hatred.

"Listen, buddy, I'm telling you it's the first time all right. So don't you try any monkey business."

Norbert, struck by this sudden outburst as by a whiplash, felt his wrestler's muscles tense for action, ready to recoil, and answered right back:

"Don't come on so high and mighty. That don't wash with me. You don't think I'm some kind of hick, do you now? I saw you, man. You cheated."

And, with the force of his bodily mass added to the force of

his anger at finding himself defied, he came close enough to Querelle to touch him with the whole of his body, from brow to knee. Querelle stood his ground. In a still deeper voice, Norbert went on, impassively:

"And I think that's enough of that. Don't you? It wasn't me who asked you. Get ready."

That was a command such as Querelle had never before received. It came from no recognized, conventional and detached authority, but from an imperative that had issued from within himself. His own strength and vitality were ordering him to bend over. He felt like punching Norbert in the mouth. The muscles of his body, of his arms, thighs, calves were ready for action, contracted, flexed, taut, almost on tiptoes. Speaking right into Norbert's teeth, into his very breath, Querelle said:

"Man, you're mistaken. It's your old lady I was after."

"And what else is new."

Norbert grabbed him by the shoulders and tried to swing him around. Querelle wanted to push him away, but his pants had started gravitating toward his ankles. To retain them, he opened his legs a bit wider. They glared at each other. The sailor knew he was the stronger one, even in spite of Norbert's athletic build. Nevertheless he yanked up his pants and stepped back a pace. He relaxed his face muscles, raised his eyebrows, frowned a little, then shook his head lightly, to indicate resignation:

"All right," he said.

Both men, still facing each other, relaxed and simultaneously put their hands behind their backs. This perfectly synchronized double gesture surprised both of them. There was an element of understanding, there. Querelle grinned, looking pleased.

"So you've been a sailor."

Norbert snorted, then answered, testily, in a voice still somewhat shaken by anger:

"Zephir."

Querelle was struck by the exceptional quality of the man's voice. It was solid. It was, at one and the same time, a marble

column issuing out of his mouth, holding him up, and against which he rested. It was, above all, to this voice that Querelle had submitted.

"What's that?"

"Zephir. The Battalion, if you prefer."

Their hands moved to unfasten their belts, and sailors' belts are, for practical reasons, buckled behind their backs—to avoid, for example, an unsightly pot-belly effect when wearing a tight-fitting rig. Thus, certain adventurous characters for no other motive than their own memories of Navy days, or their submission to the glamor of the naval uniform, retain or adopt that particular eccentricity. Querelle felt a whole lot friendlier. Since the brothelkeeper belonged to the same family as himself, with roots stretching far down into the same shadowy and perfumed lands, this very scene was something like one of those trite little escapades in the tents of the African Battalion—which no one mentions later when meeting again on civvy street. Enough had been said. Now Querelle had to execute himself. That's what he would do.

"Get over there, to the bed."

Like the wind subsides at sea, all anger had subsided. Norbert's voice was flat. Querelle pulled his leather belt out of the loops and held it in his hand. His pants had slipped down over his calves, leaving his knees bare, and, on the red carpet, they looked like a sluggish pool in which he was standing.

"Come on. Turn round. It won't take long."

Querelle faced about. He bent over, supporting himself on clenched fists—one closed round the belt buckle—on the edge of the divan. Norbert felt disheveled and unobserved. With a light and calm touch he liberated his prick from his underpants and held it for a moment, heavy and extended in his hand. He saw his reflection in the mirror in front of him and knew it was repeated twenty times in this room. He was strong. He was The Master. Total silence reigned. Advancing calmly, Norbert rested his hand on his prick as if it were some strong and flexible tree

branch—leaning, as it were, on himself. Querelle was waiting, head bowed, blood mounting to his face; Nono looked at the sailor's buttocks: they were small and hard, round, dry, and covered with a thick brown fleece which continued on to the thighs and—but there, more sparsely—up to the small of the back, where the striped undershirt just peeped out from under the raised jersey. The shading on certain drawings of female rumps is achieved by incurving strokes of the brush, not unlike those bands of different colors on old-fashioned stockings: that is how I would like the reader to visualize the bared parts of Querelle's thighs. What gave them a look of indecency was that they could have been reproduced by those incurving strokes, with their emphasis on rounded curves, and the graininess of the skin, the slightly dirty gray of the curling hairs. The monstrousness of male love affairs appears in the uncovering of that part of the body, framed by undershirt and dropped pants.

"That's the way I like you."

Querelle did not reply. The smell of the opium packet lying on the bed disgusted him. And there the rod was already, entering. He recalled the Armenian he had strangled in Beirut, his softness, his lizard- or birdlike gentleness. Querelle asked himself whether he should try to please the executioner with caresses. Having no fear of ridicule now, he might as well try out that sweetness the murdered pederast had exuded.

"He did call me the fanciest names I ever did hear, that's for sure. One of the softest, he was, too," he thought.

But what gestures of affection were appropriate? What caresses? His muscles did not know which way to bend to obtain a curve. Norbert was crushing him. Slowly he penetrated him up to the point where his belly touched Querelle, whom he was holding close, with sudden, fearsome intensity, his hands clasped round the sailor's belly. He was surprised how warm it was inside of Querelle. He pushed in farther, very carefully, the better to savor his pleasure and his strength. Querelle was astonished at suffering so little pain.

"He's not hurting me. Have to admit he knows how to do it."

What he felt was a new *nature* entering into him and establishing itself there, and he was exquisitely aware of his being changed into a catamite.

"What's he going to say to me afterwards? Hope he doesn't want to talk."

In a vague way he felt grateful toward Norbert for protecting him, in thus covering him. A sense of some degree of affection for his executioner occurred to him. He turned his head slightly, hoping, after all, and despite his anxiety, that Norbert might kiss him on the mouth; but he couldn't even manage to see his face. The boss had no tender feelings for him whatsoever, nor would it ever have entered his head that a man could kiss another. Silently, his mouth half-open, Norbert was taking care of it, like of any serious and important business. He was holding Querelle with seemingly the same passion a female animal shows when holding the dead body of her young offspring—the attitude by which we comprehend what love is: consciousness of the division of what previously was one, of what it is to be thus divided, while you yourself are watching yourself. The two men heard nothing but the sound of each other's breathing. Querelle felt like weeping over the skin he had sloughed and abandoned—where? at the foot of the city wall of Brest?—but his eyes, open in one of the deep folds of the velvet bedcover, remained dry.

"Here it comes."

At the first thrust, so strong it almost killed him, Querelle whimpered quietly, then more loudly, until he was moaning without restraint or shame. Such lively expression of pleasure gave Norbert reason to feel certain that this sailor was not really a man, in that he was not able to exercise, at the moment of pleasure, the traditional reserve and restraint of the manly male. The murderer suddenly felt ill at ease, hardly able to formulate the reason for it: "Is that what it's like, being a real

fairy?" he thought. But at once he felt floored by the full weight of the French Police Force: without really succeeding, Mario's face was attempting to substitute itself for that of the man who was screwing him. Querelle ejaculated onto the velvet. A little higher up on the cover he softly buried his head with its strangely disordered black curls, untidy and lifeless like the grass on an upturned clump of turf. Norbert had stopped moving. His jaws relaxed, letting go of the downy nape of Querelle's neck which he had been biting. Then the brothel-keeper's massive bulk, very gently and slowly, withdrew from Querelle. Querelle was still holding his belt.

The discovery of the murdered sailor caused no panic, not even surprise. Crimes are no more common in Brest than anywhere else, but by its climate of fog, rain, and thick low cloud, by the grayness of the granite, the memory of the galley slaves, by the presence, right next to the city but beyond its walls—and for that reason all the more stirring—of Bougen Prison, by the old penitentiary, by the invisible but durable thread that linked the old salts, admirals, sailors, fishermen, to the tropical regions, the city's atmosphere is such, heavy yet luminous, that it seems to us not only conducive, but even essential to the flowering of a murder. Flowering is the word. It appears obvious to us that a knife slashing the fog at any conceivable spot, or a revolver bullet boring a hole in it, at the height of a man, might well burst a bubble full of blood and cause it to stream along the inside walls of the vaporous edifice. No matter where the blow falls, small stars of blood appear in the wounded fog. In whatever direction you extend your hand (already so far from your body that it no longer belongs to you), now invisible, solitary and anonymous, the back of it will brush against—or your fingers grab hold of—the strong, trembling, naked, hot, ready-for-action, rid-of-its-underwear prick of a docker or sailor who waits there, burning hot and ice cold,

transparent and erect, to project a jet of jism into the froggy fog. (Ah, those knock-out body fluids: blood, sperm, tears!) Your own face is so close to another, invisible face that you can sense the blush of his affect. And all faces are beautiful, softened, purified by their blurriness, velvety with droplets clinging to cheeks and ears, but the bodies grow thicker and heavier and appear enormously powerful. Under their patched and worn blue denim pants (let us add, for our own pleasure, that the men on the waterfront still wear red cloth underwear similar in color to the pants worn by those olden-day galley slaves), the dockers and workmen usually have on another pair which gives the outer pair the heavy look of bronze clothes on statues—and you will perhaps be even more aroused when you realize that the rod in your hand has managed to penetrate so many layers of material, that it needed such care on the part of thick and work-soiled fingers to undo this double row of fly-buttons, to prepare your joy—and this double garment makes a man's lower half appear more massive.

The corpse was taken to the morgue in the Naval Hospital. The autopsy revealed nothing not already known. He was buried two days later. Admiral de D . . . du M . . . , Commander of the Port, ordered the police judge to conduct a serious and secret investigation and to keep him informed of its progress on a daily basis. He hoped to be able to avert any scandal that might besmirch the entire Navy. Armed with flashlights, police inspectors searched woods and thickets and all overgrown ditches. They searched meticulously, turning over every little heap of manure they came across. They passed close to the tree where Querelle had gone to his true condemnation. They discovered nothing: no knife, no footprint, not a shred of clothing, not a single blond hair. Nothing but the cheap cigarette lighter Querelle had handed to the young sailor; it lay in the grass, not far from the dead body. The police said they were unable to determine whether it had belonged to the murderer or to his victim. Nothing was learned in an enquiry as to its