

The Tangier Dream
An Unpublished Novel

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excerpt

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Chapter Three

~~The Second Coming~~

On the Beach

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Synthia looked on from the window at the sign for the DIAMOND and waited for ten o'clock. She had quickly fallen asleep the previous night. As soon as she'd woken up that morning, she'd randomly plucked one of the many poetry collections lined up in a row beside her bed. This was her routine: she kicked off the morning with poetry. She didn't leave the bed until she found a poem that left its mark in her memory.

She'd been brewing coffee when she'd thought of Rezy, and even now, standing at the window with a cup in one hand and a cigarette in the other, she thought again about what kind of deal she'd become a part of. What would she get out of it? Sure, he was attractive. That alone could have been enough, but Synthia doubted it. *Maybe there's no deal at all and I'm just over-thinking it*, she thought. But no. She knew all about men, and she knew that this one, whose brain was on fire with a passion not only for the city of Tangier but also for the universe, would want more. If not that same day, they would be fucking very soon. That much

was certain. But there would be something lying in wait beyond the sex. Every part of Synthia's body was telling her about some sort of deal.

Then she remembered a line she'd read a few minutes earlier: *"One day when I was twenty-nine years old I met you and nothing happened."* She couldn't help smiling. There were also people who were 27, 26, 23, and other ages in that poem, but there was no one who was 28—Synthia's age. She put out the cigarette against one of the window's hinges and walked back into the bedroom so she could read the poem again, having forgotten the ending. *"I was twenty-nine, and so were you. We had a very passionate time. Everything I read turned into a story about you and me, and everything I did was turned into a poem."*

She saw herself in the mirror of the dresser. She stared for a bit. The gaze of her own eyes calmed her.

Even if it was a deal, Synthia realized two things. First, that Rezy seemed like secure territory; he wasn't a threat. No need to be shy about the fact that his physical imperfection made her feel even safer, and safety was the first step on her pyramid. Thinking about this, she had to laugh about how she'd missed that he was missing an arm, how he'd managed to hide the entire prosthetic until he was right in front of her.

Second was that wonderful circumstance that Synthia could say anything that was on her mind, be the most transparent and bitchy versions of herself as much as she wanted, without the slightest hesitation. There, she'd already tested the one and the other. She'd been listened to on both occasions: when she'd been transparent and when she'd been a bitch. So, she concluded, what could be better than being attracted to a guy who was all ears!

They went down to the shore by way of the Jewish Cemetery and the Rue du Portugal. The city had fallen silent because of the holiday celebration. There was none of Tangier's usual chaos, even outside the medina. The fiercely blowing winds from the Strait of Gibraltar blustered through the unfaded Moroccan flags lining the shore. The banners shimmered so brightly that if you were visiting as a guest, you'd think they were changing them, hanging fresh ones at the start of every week.

Synthia wasn't all that taken with the beaches of Tangier. She considered them the city's only flaw. So, they decided to call a taxi and head to Achakkar. Synthia concluded that Rezy would blindly follow her anywhere.

The vacant sky-blue Dacia took a while to appear. They were waiting for ten minutes. Their driver had a total of four digits between both hands. His left hand was missing the thumb and index finger, while he only had the thumb remaining on his right. They only noticed the lack of fingers when the speed of the car began to bother Synthia. She didn't say anything about it since it was so difficult to catch a cab in Morocco, especially during a holiday. Besides, there are places in many cities, for the most part on the territory of the old medina, where cars are not allowed to go, where the hum of mopeds and the braying of donkeys prevail. On the narrow streets where the forefathers of the glue-sniffing children used to carry heavy water vessels and sold water by the glass, those children work as guides—they can sense foreigners at a glance, whether the latter are looking to get home or somewhere else, and immediately flock to them,

putting them in a daze. They take them to their destination the long way round and then proudly demand several dirhams in payment.

"Give me your hand," said Rezy. Synthia screwed up her face but held her hand out anyway. Rezy caressed it.

"Did you wake up with the sun today?"

"That's when the prayers start, right?"

"Yeah."

"The muezzin starts his chanting from right next to my room."

"Well, what did you expect when you chose an Airbnb in the medina?"

"I thought it was an old city so—"

"Give me your other hand."

"What?" she said, and reached her hand out, holding onto his prosthetic.

"I want to be touching these fingers."

"You're a weirdo."

"Yeah, maybe. So are you."

Before they turned at Cape Spartel to continue toward the ocean by way of the nature preserve, someone else waved for the taxi. The Dacia stopped and the stranger got in. Rezy was taken aback, but Synthia explained that this was the norm in Morocco.

Synthia stopped the taxi at a part of the highway where all the flora was overgrown. "Trust me," she told Rezy, and started leading him by his prosthetic. Once they got to a part of the beach that was free of the garbage and glass brought to shore by the wind, they took off their shoes and enjoyed a pleasant walk in the hot sand.

Before they got to the ocean, Rezy started saying silly things, without himself knowing why. First he talked about

the families who prayed at dawn, then told her how his city was the Kabul of Christianity, a place where people came out onto the streets during a holiday instead of staying home. And he told her about the holiday known as the "Second Coming." He told her about how it was divided into three parts, where the Messiah is played by three beautiful, sexy young priests. He told her about how it starts on Mount Makhata, where they take the priest down from the cross and reverently lead him to the city's largest church while he's seated on a donkey. Everyone wears white. The more muscular young men have chains strapped around their shoulders and this is how they climb the hill—on the one hand, it's as if they're performing a sort of penance, but mostly they're just trying to impress the religious girls there. Having gotten to Trinity Cathedral, the tired priest is replaced by another; the second priest is already wearing an expensive, bejeweled costume, and the crowd then takes him to Heroes' Square in an ox-drawn carriage. It is on this trip that the procession turns into a celebration. The people there take off their whites and put on their reds. The final part takes place along the longest avenue in the city, where the third priest is already waiting to offer up a prayer and combine the role of Christ with the role of *tamada*, "toastmaster." He seats himself at the head of the table and the whole city joins in the banquet. A tireless feasting and drinking ensues. Finally, by the time the entire avenue and every street that branches off from it start to smell of roasted meats, and the drunken faithful go at each other with curses and kisses, it gets dark and they all disperse.

And if they hadn't made it to the beach soon, who knows how many other silly things the stoned Rezy would've come up with...

"I had a completely different impression of your people," said Synthia and chose a spot on the beach to lay out a large towel. She put her bag at one corner so the wind wouldn't blow it away and started to undress. She was wearing the same dress she'd worn the night before and, under it, an orange bikini. Once she'd taken the dress off, she sat down on the towel and filled both of her palms with sand, then slowly let the grains fall through her fingers. She did the same thing two more times. This simple play saddened Rezy. He looked out at the sea. The sun's rays fell on the calm waves and the water gave off a silvery shimmer. About two or three hundred meters from the two, there was a group of foreign tourists on the beach.

"They're probably coming from the Cave of Hercules."

"What's that?"

"A tourist attraction. Shit's overrated." Synthia explained that there was a legend about how when Hercules split Africa from Europe, he planted a large column on either side; one had become the Rock of Gibraltar, and the one on the opposite side had become Morocco's Jebel Musa. Then Hercules became tired, so he went out to the ocean and took shelter in a cave. The cave isn't special in any way—you can see the whole thing in five to ten minutes—but they advertise it to tourists and it's considered one of Morocco's most important places of interest. "So, he rested and then went to carry out his twelve heroic labors."

"So Tangier was just a pit stop for Hercules," concluded Rezy, then took off his shirt and lay down next to her.

While Rezy was undressing, the reclining Synthia—warming her body under the sun's rays, her blonde hair strewn over the towel like the tentacles of a jellyfish—pored over the young man's hairy chest and coarse nipples, his

soft belly and his navel. *He has a nice navel*, she thought to herself. The navel was generally a sore spot for Synthia; as attractive as someone might be, if she didn't like their navel, she felt physically alienated from them. She could no longer consider them sexually, nor could she see anything else that made them beautiful. Rezy then sat in front of her, his back turned toward her. She could now see his strangely hairy shoulder-blade—either God or his hormones had deemed him worthy of only a single, almost imperceptible wing of downy hair on his right side.

"What's that symbol on your shoulder-blade? Is that Japanese?"

"What? Oh-h-h. Yeah, it's Japanese. It seems a little silly to me now, but I still like it."

"Why is it silly? What does it say?"

"I can't tell you. It's too embarrassing," Rezy laughed, "It's stupid. It was my first tattoo after the accident. And it's in Japanese. It's really tacky. It's good that it's on my shoulder-blade. I barely remember that it's there."

"The linework is really nice."

"Yeah, but it was an impulsive decision."

"Classic! Which tattoos are from before the accident?"

"These," he pointed to some black tattoos, "and I had another one on my arm."

"What was it? You mind telling me?"

"Not yet."

"Okay. And those bees?"

"These are from soon after the accident, too." Rezy looked down at his arm, which had numerous bees tattooed on it, "I saw a dream..."

"What kind of dream?"

"Basically, the day I had this Japanese tattoo done, that

night I dreamed about a man who was a big influence in my life at one point. He's a philosopher. And a silent film critic."

"Specifically silent films?"

"Yeah, imagine, he only writes about silent films."

"Wow."

"Yeah. When I lost my arm and wasn't leaving the house for a while, I was reading his articles and watching videos of him. I saw so many silent films in that period. I didn't even know there were that many. So basically, this guy comes to me in my dream and tells me, 'Life treats us in such interesting ways, and how simply we answer it—with tattoos.'"

"Cringe."

"Yeah. It's so vivid and clear in my memory. I even wrote it down when I woke up. My therapist had asked me to keep a record of my dreams," Rezy chuckled, "'Life treats us in such interesting ways, and how simply we answer it—with tattoos.'"

"And then?"

"I thought about it for two days. 'Is he right?' I asked myself. That dream really haunted me. But on the third day, I decided that it was bullshit and called my tattoo artist. I had these bees done that same week."

"I'm telling you, you're a weirdo."

Rezy shrugged.

"Cool story, though. And it's a great tattoo. I really like it. How did I not notice it at Baba? Or yesterday?"

"I was wearing a jacket yesterday."

"Right."

"I haven't gotten anything after this one. These are all older," he said, gesturing at the other tattoos.

"Could you get a tattoo on the prosthetic?"

"Yeah. But I'm still thinking about it. It should be iconic."

"Why?"

"I want it to make me forget what was there before."

"The tattoo you won't tell me about."

"Yeah."

"Okay. This one is better anyway. How many bees are there?"

"I can't remember."

Synthia started counting them up from the wrist to the elbow, touching each bee with her index finger. When she was about to count one on the inner part of his arm that she couldn't see, she raised his arm with her other hand but lost count at the same time.

"Fuck!" she said under her breath, and started counting from the top.

Rezy watched the young woman, excited by her touch. "It tickles," he told her at some point, and she lost count again at hearing him speak.

"Don't talk! I won't be able to rest until I count them. I'll get really angry if I lose count a third time," said Synthia, and started counting again. "One, two, three, four..."

"Hold on, Syn, hold on!" Rezy stopped her immediately.

"What-t-t?" she almost yelled.

"Do you have a pen in your bag?"

"I don't know... Why do you ask?"

"You should circle the bees you've counted so you don't mix them up." Synthia liked the idea and started rummaging around in the bag. Instead of a pen, she found some eyeliner and started circling with it. She counted 56 bees. "That's a lot of bees," she told him. Then she turned over and pointed to a tattoo on her left hip; a glimmering ray, a jellyfish, and a black fish swimming in a circle around some yellow flowers.

Rezy put his hand on her hip and noticed how quickly goose bumps covered her body, as if she'd touched stinging nettle.

"I really like this galaxy the ray is filled in with."

"That one was supposed to be black, too, but I decided on having them color it in like this. And this one's a knifefish!" Synthia put a finger on the black fish. "A ghost knifefish. It can swim backwards."

Rezy nodded, then frowned. He wanted to remove his hand, but he felt awkward about it. She was looking right at his face. Rezy felt her gaze, so he didn't take his eyes off the tattoo. Finally, he looked at her and leaned in to kiss her. As they kissed, he felt how dizzy Synthia's scent made him feel, though he couldn't tell whether this scent came from her mouth or from some other part of her body. In the span of a hundredth of a second, he remembered how the crawling centipede suddenly falls from the wall in *Naked Lunch*.

Rezy had never picked up on someone's scent for no reason. It was as if his body was governed by a biological algorithm, and as soon as he developed a strong emotional attachment to someone, the first thing Rezy noticed was their scent. From that second on, the deal became a reality. Rezy didn't think of this in that particular moment, but he realized what a strange, or even frightening thing passion was—it turned even his sense of smell on its head. *What a foul scent*, was the first thing he thought. If he'd encountered the same scent anywhere else, he would definitely have considered it a foul one. It was just that he was having trouble acknowledging that now, but it was hard for him to think of a different word. It was as if one of the teeth in Synthia's mouth was rotten. *Disturbing comparison*, he thought immediately. This foulness was like the dizzying aroma of a poisonous plant, of the kind of flower that gives

you an allergic reaction, but which nothing could make you remove from your room because you like it, because it calms you to look at and to smell even from afar. In that same hundredth of a second, or perhaps slightly earlier, when he first breathed in that scent, Rezy also felt that some mist had enveloped and dazed him, and he felt he was prepared to be dazed in the same way many times over. All for the sake of that scent, he was ready to go to every dictionary in the world, all the millions of publications, and with his own hand—which could just barely manage to produce legible handwriting—change the definition of the word *foul* or else cross it out with such intensity that the paper would tear through.

Rezy was only able to adjust his green swimming shorts once Synthia moved her hand down his right shoulder. Then she removed her lips from his and, as if nothing had happened, continued the conversation. "I have another tattoo on my back," she told him, but Rezy was so dazed he couldn't join the conversation.

"You were somewhere else."

"I was somewhere else."

"You back?"

"I'm back," he said, smiling. Then he asked her to show him the tattoo. Synthia lay down on her belly. He looked at the orange-red circle.

"It's the sun. Or a birthmark. Or just a big circle. I don't know, really. I just wanted to get it."

"Or a button," said Rezy, and pressed it. "Power on! What did I just activate?"

"I hadn't thought of that!"

"Think about it."

Synthia rolled over and turned her face to the sun again.

Lying side by side, they caressed each other's fingers and listened to the waves. Enthralled as they were by the sun, they didn't need to hear anything else. They didn't even want to talk to each other, and almost as though they'd signed an agreement about this silence, they didn't feel a second of anxiety or discomfort, the kind of anxiety and discomfort that accompanies unexpected bouts of silence. Rezy thought this was exactly what he needed: this closeness, this intimacy, this companionship; a space where he could express himself without any sort of self-censorship. And despite the fact that Synthia and Rezy would fuck quite a bit over the course of this novel, the young man still had the ephemeral thought that, even if tomorrow was the day after which he would never be able to touch Synthia's freckled skin again, what was happening right now was already enough for him. It was possible he was fooling himself, because they hadn't even slept together, they hadn't gotten to know each other as they later would, as they truly needed to. But what was already happening there and then, if it had really ended that same day, both of them would make the best of it, without any drama.

And what was happening was happening in August of 2019, when neither of them knew that the world would be swept away by a pandemic, the sort of thing everyone thought was a thing of the past; that the world would be swept away by wars and that the earth around them would be drenched with the blood of children, blood that even the most bloodthirsty vampire wouldn't dare to touch; that Lionel Messi would hold the World Cup over the most beautiful and unjust tournament in history. The World Cup where the Moroccans would be so close to fulfilling their dreams that they would hate the prospect of waking up; that

soon after their waking up from this dream, the earth would quake under Morocco's villages and consign to history the invisible settlements nestled in the mountains, which Synthia loved so much; that Synthia would turn 30 and find even more peace of mind than she felt in that moment lying on the beach; and that Rezy would reach a sacral age and lose his peace of mind; and that the author of this story, with his unrestrained ego, would never get his novel published; not only that, the author didn't know that he'd never finish the novel.

Rezy stood up and removed the prosthetic—all it took was one *click*. Then he went into the water. The sound of the *click* roused Synthia, who shielded her brow and looked out at Rezy. She didn't take her eyes off him for a long while.

"*Shoot your way to freedom!*" Rezy said to himself. "*'Christ?' sneers a vicious, fruity old Saint applying pancake from an alabaster bowl... 'That cheap ham! You think I'd demean myself to commit a miracle? That one should have stood in carny...*" Just then, the enormous shadow of a seagull passed over Synthia. This *Archaeopteryx* of our time flew toward Rezy, caught a fish in the water a few meters from him, and flew back to shore.

"Did you see that?" he yelled to Synthia. She nodded. She then got up and waded into the water herself. "It startled me."

"I hate seagulls."

"I was tripping for a second. I happened to think of this quote from Burroughs and then this thing flew over. It was like I was on a trip."

"What, you just casually think of Burroughs quotes like that?"

"Apparently. It surprised me, too."

Synthia wanted to say something else, but she decided against it. She was too shy.

"When did you read Burroughs?"

"Oh, come on! 'Burroughs, Burroughs, Burroughs...'"

"Okay, I was just trying to start a conversation."

"Not just now, please. The water is so warm," said the young woman, and laid herself out on it belly up.

"*The water so warm that day*," Rezy recited, continuing in a sing-song voice, "*I was counting out the waves...*"

"I read him in Berlin," she said after a while.

"What were you doing in Berlin?"

"Having the worst time of my life. Reading the worst writer I've ever read. Damn it! So you're still trying to get my story."

"Yeah, I am."

"Okay. Imagine a trip lasting longer than two years. Snorting and popping things, not just over the weekends, sometimes even on the way home from work. In the morning, you have to look at a bunch of prim and proper German kids again. I was working in a school there, too. The only friends I had, I'd met at clubs. I thought I was making friends in the dark rooms of KitKat and Griessmühle. When you sit in a swing at Berghain and talk to someone during a trip, if you exchange Instagram handles or phone numbers you become friends with them. If you actually make plans, though, it's only ever to go clubbing. I don't understand people who say going to a rave is relaxing. It's the exact opposite. Dancing and drugs were what pushed me over the edge into the things I was most afraid of. I managed to leave both behind me when I got to Tangier, but then I started to feel this vast emptiness in my life. My fears and anxieties turned out to be the only things in my thoughts, my

existence. It had been two years, but my mom's death still pained me like it had on the first day, and so did the other family dramas, my old relationship, my band breaking up..." Synthia floated weightlessly on her back with her eyes closed, a seagull circling her and a silvery, blindingly shimmering cloud playing with her vision. "I had no idea how nice it could be to talk to someone over lunch at work, or at a park somewhere. All these ravers ever talk about is techno and partying! And those poetic rock-n-roll songs we used to cover in the band had turned into nothing more than flashbacks. So I distanced myself from it day by day, because I wanted to find the real Synthia, find out who I am. In reality, I was fooling myself when I tried certain things. Just like that, I killed myself little by little every day. I convinced myself that I'd get somewhere by being the belle of the ball. I took MDMA nonstop at one point, before I came to hate it. I realized I had no more serotonin left in my body, and the drugs couldn't really get me anywhere. When we take these crystals, we come to think of it as an inexhaustible well of artificial happiness. Yet everything can be experienced only a certain number of times, can't it?" - as she said this, Synthia remembered a completely different writer. In a few seconds, she would mention the American authors she had read on off-white pages while living in Berlin, and those authors would hijack her train of thought. But her body—the body that was, at this moment, bobbing in the Atlantic Ocean—belonged to the dulcet words of a completely different writer. "That was when I read *Junkie* and *Naked Lunch*, though I don't remember either one. I don't even remember the weekends; even if I wanted to tell you about them—what happened at this or that party, who was playing at which one, what we did there—I can't recall any of it.

Every weekend went by like a picture in a film reel, like I was zoned out watching some 48-hour movie. On the other hand, I remember the school schedule, the authors I read a million times with the kids: Mark Twain, Harper Lee, E. B. White... It turned out Mark Twain fueled my escapism. What a funny word, "escapism." That was what helped me. Huck helped me survive. Huck and the kids. I only understood that in Tangier. Long story short, my time there made me realize a lot of things. One of those things was the simple fact that I was inexperienced, I didn't know what "fun" was—I don't actually have anything against techno—and I didn't know what loneliness was. Yet the experience of loneliness is vital. How you can discover yourself, how you relate to the world—it helps you figure all that out."

"How did you relate to the world?"

"As 'Iron Synthia,'" said the young woman, straightening up, and stopped bobbing in the water. "With a growl, wearing a tough girl's mask. I had to have balls. I realized too late that true strength, the way I should have protected myself, wasn't to be barking all the time, but to express my emotions out loud, to let it all out. I only realized how strong I was when I'd completely given up, when I cried and bawled my eyes out here in Tangier. I remember it was as if something strange ran through my veins like an electric current, the way your body trembles when you fall in love."

"Maybe you fell in love with Synthia?"

"You may be right. I fell in love with my vulnerable, lost self. My lucky self. I can't ever forget that. I'm lucky. Even if for no other reason than that I listened to my aunt; that she is the kind of aunt that she is, and that I listened to her. She came to visit me in Berlin at one point. That was when she suggested that I come here. I was always crying here, too. It

was still really hard for me in Tangier. It took me more than a year to understand what was happening, how I was feeling. I started therapy, in French. Expressing myself in a different language helped. It was like I was talking about myself in the third person. I gained some weight, too. Later I confided in one or two people I'd met who are friends of mine now. I realized that I only had one friend there. I don't even know if I can actually call her a friend. I've just realized that she was the only person who took care of me then. But you can't feel anything in the moment. It was my roommate, Sophia. When I didn't go back, she sold my stuff and sent me the money. She even came to visit me here for a week. She's a really kind person. The people in our friend group just stood by when we were all destroying each other. None of us said a word. In the end, it's your friends' silence, their not speaking up, that stays with you. It's strange, isn't it? How can a person remember silence as well as something that's said to them? So we all went our separate ways, those of us whose only connection was the drugs. We went all over the place. One committed suicide. I don't even know where another disappeared to. Some of them managed to escape. I remember what I did the weekend before I came to Tangier. I knew I'd stay clean here. I was thinking I'd stay for three, four weeks. But deep inside I was thinking that if I managed to get out of Berlin, maybe I'd never return. So that last weekend, I gave myself a survival challenge. I took a ton of drugs. A new one every two hours. My chances of surviving were fifty-fifty. And I survived it. So, that's what I did in Berlin."

"I actually just meant what you did there job-wise, but I'm glad you told me the whole story.

"Damn it! Did I tell you all that for nothing?"

"Cut the crap! 'For nothing?' I know you better now, don't I? I know the real deal."

"The real deal. Come on, let's get out of the water."

Synthia wrung the water in her hair out onto the sand. The drops of ocean water made the grains of sand stick together into chickpea-sized clumps.

"Did you like anything in Berlin?"

"I liked the city. It's a great city, Berlin. It's just that I wasn't that great myself. I couldn't make the best of my time in it. I liked the techno culture there, too. You could find so many different kinds of people in a club, so many different kinds of trauma, so many different ways to have fun, to interact, to be lonely, to dance. I liked the Spree. Water is my element. It's been the solution to so many of my problems. Being able to see the ocean from my place here means a lot to me. When I was studying in Atlanta, sometimes I'd go to Brunswick just to go to the beach. So when I was in Berlin, I'd visit the banks of the Spree a lot. I identify with water sometimes, especially rivers. Even when I'm calm, I'm still running somewhere. I don't know where I start, or where I'm going. I probably change my riverbed from time to time for one reason or another, so I come across many different places and many different people. Sometimes I might dry up and I need a good rain to come alive again."

"So, you either need rain to come alive again like a river, or sunlight to defrost you like a frog."

"Look at this guy! You remembered!"

"Of course! What, you don't remember what I told you yesterday?"

"How could I not? 'Meta-human.'"

"You bitch!" said Rezy playfully.

"That you didn't want to be a bassist. Your 19th birthday.

Jim Jarmusch, Burroughs, the point of the universe..."

"All right, all right, I'm not quizzing you or anything."

"I was quizzing myself."

"What made you go to those dark rooms? Did you like something about it?"

"I liked the feeling of being completely unimportant. I wasn't exactly alone, but at the same time nobody knew my name, or where I was from, what I did. I wasn't supposed to live up to any kind of expectation. And being unimportant was what was important at the time. That sounds pretty stupid now, but that's how it was. It's just that it was also pretty self-destructive. That's the downside. At some point, you start hating how unimportant you are."

"You want to be loved by someone, to be important to them."

"Exactly. You want it. It's the sort of thing you can't avoid wanting. The sense of unimportance makes you a lot stronger when you realize that no one cares about your life. You become your own ecosystem. You become richer internally. But I only realized these things in Tangier. I couldn't really have thought about 'internal richness' in Berlin, could I? So when I realized that, it was like a great weight was lifted from my shoulders. And you see how slender my shoulders and arms are. I can't bear the weight of the world."

"I've been feeling important for the second day in a row now."

Synthia lay down alongside him. She stared at his face for a bit and then kissed him. They kissed for a long time. If there hadn't been tourists nearby, the two might've fucked then and there, caught up in their passion as they were. This same thought occurred to both of them. They caressed each

other's bodies. Synthia took his index finger into her hand and glided it gently over the top of her right breast. She asked if he knew what the bulge that he felt there was. She explained it to him and asked him to be gentle with that breast. Then the young woman reined in her passion again, separated herself from him, and rolled over to the edge of the huge towel. She reached into her bag and started rolling a joint.

"Earlier I said that I didn't remember a single weekend. But there was one that I think I'll never forget."

"I'm listening."

"I'm in Berghain, dancing, serotonin flooding my body, and then I see my ex right in front of me. Jeff. The guy I spent six years with. I got anxious the moment I saw him, and as soon as our eyes met, I kissed him and hugged him. I'm told I said that I missed him. He kissed me back. At some point I took his hand and led him away from the dance floor. We sat ourselves down in some corner and talked for a long time. I had my head in his lap for over an hour. I remember how he stroked my head. I unpacked everything I had to say. I vomited it all over him. I was telling him how much I loved him and cursing him out at the same time. Meanwhile, he continued to stroke me. I'm sobering up, holding his hand, and I realize how much the texture of his skin has changed. I sit up and some strange dude is sitting there beside me. I'd had my head in his lap this whole time. I panicked and said, 'You're not Jeff.' He answered me right away: 'I know, but don't be scared.' I'm panicking, repeating over and over, 'You're not Jeff. You're not Jeff.' Then I asked this guy why he'd done all this. He told me, 'If I hadn't played along it would've been a waste of a perfectly good dramatic episode, and I wouldn't have been able to forgive myself.'"

"Damn. That's actually very sweet!"

"It is. It was a charming answer. I won't ever forget it. We stayed together till morning. We didn't dance any more, though. I didn't even ask for his name. It's only right that I didn't. I can't remember his face, either. I just remember this story. Thank God I still remember it. I keep refreshing it in my memory. Because I kept doing the same things after that day. This episode was the only ray of light. But you know what it taught me?"

"What?"

"That time doesn't mean a thing. It means nothing at all. Some stranger was able to make me feel as much in three or four hours as more than a hundred other people during those years in Berlin. The mood is what's important, the person's energy. It hadn't even been four hours, and the sun was already rising, when I realized that that guy wasn't Jeff. That's why I love the kinds of people you meet during these episodes. That morning I walked along the Spree and considered whether I should jump. It was another dramatic episode I just couldn't pass up. I wasn't brave enough, though. I was brave enough to take a thousand different kinds of drugs, but I still couldn't dare to jump into a river. I'm a pretty good swimmer, too."

The scorching heat of midday was already bearing down on them. Two bodies glistening with sunscreen lay stoned and limp on the beach, listening to the Leonard Cohen album *I'm Your Man* on a red, padlock-shaped speaker.

"I love this song," said the young woman, and started lip-syncing the words to it.

*...And I'm crazy for love but I'm not coming on
I'm just paying my rent every day in the Tower of Song*

*I said to Hank Williams, how lonely does it get?
Hank Williams hasn't answered yet
But I hear him coughing all night long
Oh, a hundred floors above me in the Tower of Song
I was born like this, I had no choice...*

When it got unbearably hot, they collected their things and headed for the residential area on foot along the highway. Getting there didn't take long. There were two taxis at a café there. Synthia arranged for one of the drivers to wait for them while they bought sandwiches at the café. She also confirmed that they could eat them in the car.

As the car drove at a respectable speed on the empty highway, Rezy reached his prosthetic out of the window and started weaving his hand through the air. Synthia couldn't help but smile looking at it.

"Do you always tap your nails like this?" Synthia asked about his nervous tic, unable to hold back.

Rezy stopped moving his fingers. He looked at his hand.

"Yeah. Another thing I can't stop doing."

"I noticed," she said, taking his hand into hers, "how firmly is that prosthetic attached?"

"Don't worry. I do this all the time. It's how I bring it to life." The driver drove around the Cape, avoiding Spartel Park, and followed the avenue of palm trees, descending from the hill. Tangier unfurled before them, colored a strange red; it wasn't quite dark red or ruby red, neither brick nor blood red, neither cherry nor mahogany. There was probably a color code for this hue, but Synthia couldn't say what color the city was from this angle. Not only that, she couldn't have told you with certainty whether the view before them actually counted as part of Tangier. Synthia

didn't like cities overgrown with suburbs. She didn't consider these places part of the city. She preferred narrow, strictly bounded areas, where she could easily see where they began and where they ended. Her own boundlessness was enough for her to deal with.

They got to the Place de France and went down the Rue de la Liberté. Synthia stepped into the main entrance to her building.

"I should go up."

"Okay."

"I have to shower quickly and then meet up with my coworkers to go over some school stuff."

"Okay."

"Then I need to feed a friend's cat. They're not here themselves, so I and another friend are taking turns caring for it."

"Why are you giving me a report?" Rezy laughed.

"I don't know," Synthia laughed with him.

They fell silent for a few seconds. Then Rezy sang something quietly, in Georgian.

"You should come over tonight."

"I will. What time?"

"Hm. Eleven? Ten?"

"I'll be here at ten."

Synthia kissed him. They kissed slowly. He wrapped his hand around the small of her back. Synthia had her palm on the back of his neck. At one point they pressed their lips together for a long while.

"It's lust."

"What?"

"This," Synthia pressed Rezy's hand to her orange-red tattoo, "the power button." She smiled at him. Then she asked

in a whisper, "We're screwing tonight, right?"

"No, I'm just coming up for tea."

"Fuck you."

"Fuck me," he nodded.

"Tonight."

"Tonight."

Rezy later found it hard to explain why he remembered in that moment the story he'd told her in the morning, but he called out to Synthia as she made for the stairs.

"I was lying, you know, this morning. About the 'Second Coming.'"

"What?"

"When I said it was a holiday."

"Okay..." said Synthia, confused. "That's silly."

"Yeah."

"Did you lie about the dream, too?"

"What dream?"

"The one about the bee tattoo."

"No. That one's true."

"Tonight."

"Tonight."

Rezy turned away from the entrance and descended toward the Grand Souk. Compared with the morning, Tangier had become slightly more colorful. The city was no longer silent, though the sun was bearing down with such force that it would've suppressed anyone's ability to speak.

There were cats sleeping near the cannon statues.

Rezy quietly sang that song again, the one they'd listened to at work before he'd left, from the Georgian rap album that still hadn't been released.

Tonight, he thought to himself, and stepped past the wall.

"Vano, I have to tell you straight, we can't publish this fourth chapter."

"Why?"

"What do you mean, why? Don't you remember how you ended the third chapter? You can't see how this one's supposed to continue?"

"How?"

"The stuff in chapter four should really be in the fifth, or even sixth, chapter."

"I don't get it."

"Rezy shouldn't be going up to Synthia's apartment. It's too early for a date at her place."

"Why is it early? They agreed—"

"So what if they agreed!"

"Why isn't he going up, then?"

"You have to raise the anticipation. Make the reader wait a bit. Play with them. Stir up some more drama with the characters."

"No, no, no, no. They've waited long enough as it is."

"Long enough? A day? That's what you call a long time?" After hearing the publisher's criticism, the author, with his unrestrained ego, realized that not even 24 hours had passed from their meeting at the Grand Souk to their parting at Synthia's apartment building. Okay, let's say they had to wait until ten, or eleven, or even midnight—the publisher's logic made sense. But like a flaming comet that has already pierced the ozone layer, that word "lust," in addition to disturbing these two characters, also disturbed the writer of this story, and wasn't at all consistent with the publisher's thoughts about time and space. The version offered by the

confident and self-assured Nikoloz still enticed Vano; he couldn't explain why—it didn't correspond to his own thoughts and intentions at all.

He didn't know about Synthia's restlessness after she got home earlier than expected. What didn't she do to pass the time! She didn't tidy up the place, but she still did a lot: read a book, made soup, called her aunt in Rabat, bathed, put on some body lotion, did her eyebrows even though they really didn't need doing, adjusted some other hairs elsewhere on her body, listened to music, of course, and to protect herself from her heightened excitement, slid her hand between her legs a couple times—once in the shower and once while in bed.

"Why didn't we agree to meet earlier than ten!" she raged at herself.

Who could wait until ten! She waited.

At ten, she leaned on the windowsill, looked out at the sign for the DIAMOND, and scanned the Rue de la Liberté...