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A Happy Death

By Albert Camus



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In his first novel, A Happy Death, written when he was in his early twenties and retrieved from his private papers following his death in I960, Albert Camus laid the foundation for The Stranger, focusing in both works on an Algerian clerk who kills a man in cold blood. But he also revealed himself to an extent that he never would in his later fiction. For if A Happy Death is the study of a rule-bound being shattering the fetters of his existence, it is also a remarkably candid portrait of its author as a young man.

As the novel follows the protagonist, Patrice Mersault, to his victim's house -and then, fleeing, in a journey that takes him through stages of exile, hedonism, privation, and death -it gives us a glimpse into the imagination of one of the great writers of the twentieth century. For here is the young Camus himself, in love with the sea and sun, enraptured by women yet disdainful of romantic love, and already formulating the philosophy of action and moral responsibility that would make him central to the thought of our time.

Translated from the French by Richard Howard

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Editorial Review

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From the Inside Flap

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About the Author

Albert Camus was born in Algeria in 1913. His childhood was poor, although not unhappy. He studied philosophy at the University of Algiers, and became a journalist as well as organizing the Theatre de l'equipe, a young avant-garde dramatic group. His early essays were collected in L'Envers et l'endroit (The Wrong Side and the Right Side) and Noces (Nuptials). He went to Paris, where he worked on the newspaper Paris Soir before returning to Algeria. His play, Caligula, appeared in 1939. His first two important books, L'Etranger (The Outsider) and the long essay Le Mythe de Sisyphe (The Myth of Sisyphus), were published when he returned to Paris. After the occupation of France by the Germans in 1941, Camus became one of the intellectual leaders of the Resistance movement. He edited and contributed to the underground newspaper Combat, which he had helped to found. After the war he devoted himself to writing and established an international reputation with such books as La Peste (The Plague 1947), Les Justes (The Just 1949) and La Chute (The Fall; 1956). During the late 1950s Camus renewed his active interest in the theatre, writing and directing stage adaptations of William Faulkner's Requiem for a Nun and Dostoyevsky's The Possessed. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957. He was killed in a road accident in 1960.

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