

**Mouloud MAMMERI**

*The Crossing*

Translated from French by

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**W**hat they  
wanted was  
the good life —  
the good life  
for everyone,

or, if that was impossible, at least for them: you had to start somewhere. At first they weren't sure how to go about it. What is the good life? The older ones remembered what they had seen Europeans do, while the younger ones preferred to learn from films and TV. Dancing, drinking, playing with big toys, pretending not to be jealous of your wife. It turned out that the good life was all very well, but they couldn't share it with the muddy and illiterate peasant women who up until then had been their wives and sexual outlets. So, after the war, one after the other, they had divorced. They had remarried made-up bourgeois girls, with bleached hair, covered with jewelry, who spoke French and rolled their "r"s; the luckiest ones, or the most oblivious, had married European women during their many trips around the world working for the organization.

The only problem, of course, was the others, the ones outside, who had neither whisky nor "r"-trilling blond wives nor party games. Since they had been told over and over again that paradise is for everyone, they had believed it and were pushing up against the doors so hard that one of these days the doors were going to give. The bastards! Don't they see what they're doing? Don't they even realize, don't they see that if they keep pushing, they're going to fall, those doors, and paradise will be destroyed. And what would they have gained, those imbeciles, once they had destroyed paradise? In any case there's no way they could possibly all fit in, space is limited and people like that have children every time they turn around.

Every once in a while the chosen few opened the door just a crack, taking a calculated risk. They let a few in, but — since it was always the cleverest ones — it was all to the good, because newcomers were always the fiercest gatekeepers. Sometimes, though, by mistake, a poor sap like Mourad got in. That was the beginning of the end, because this kind of spoil sport lets in a draft, and with all that fresh air you never know what can happen. Come off it, you fool! You've got twenty years more to live, don't waste them being a boy scout. Anyone who acts like a boy scout after age 15 should have his head examined. If wine and women don't cure you, there are psychiatrists, and if even they can't do anything, then you're incurable, you have leprosy. There are leper colonies for people like you, why don't you go there, you'll be with your own kind, you can leper away all day long, to your heart's content, all night long, until you're carried right away, far from this paradise that disgusts you so.

Mourad knew all this (Kamel, the editor of the newspaper, was certain of that), but nonetheless, he had thrown onto the table his resignation from *Alger-Révolution*. When, when would Mourad stop confusing revolutionary practice with a passing mood?

The ticket was on Mourad's table : Algiers-Paris, one way...