the age of reason

Jean-Paul Sartre

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The Reprieve follows *The Age of Reason* in Sartre's trilogy *Roads to Freedom*, and includes many of the characters of the first book. It surveys that heat-wave week in September 1938, when Europe waited tensely for the result of the Munich conference. Sartre's technique of almost simultaneous description of several scenes enables him to suggest the mood of all Europe as it tried hard to blinker itself against the threat of war.

'His method is consummately able. It is only a writer with an exquisite sense of rhythm who can mix episode with episode as M. Sartre does here' – *Observer*

IRON IN THE SOUL

This is the third part of Sartre's ambitious long novel, *Roads to Freedom*. The first two parts, *The Age of Reason* and *The Reprieve*, traced the thought and actions of a group of characters in 1938–9, the dreary time of Munich and the 'phoney war'.

In *Iron in the Soul* the same characters at last face reality in the shape of defeat and occupation. Around a graphic narrative of the fall of France, Sartre weaves a tapestry of thoughts, feelings, and incidents which portrays – as a few books about war have done – the meaning of defeat. As in the earlier books, the schoolmaster Mathieu is the most articulate character: able to reflect on the nature of freedom even as he fires his last rounds against the oncoming enemy.

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PENGUIN BOOKS

THE AGE OF REASON

Jean-Paul Sartre – possibly the best-known and most discussed modern French writer and thinker – was born in Paris in 1905. He was educated in Paris and later taught in schools at Le Havre and Laon. In 1934 he spent a year in the French Institute in Berlin where he became acquainted with modern German philosophy. He then taught at the Lycée Condorcet in Paris. He played an active role in the Resistance during the war, and afterwards left the teaching profession. Since 1964 he has spent his time writing, and editing the magazine *Les Temps modernes*.

Sartre is a Marxist and the founder of French existentialism. His philosophical works such as *L'Être et le néant* (1943) have had a profound effect on modern thought. His plays include *Huis clos* (1944; published in Penguin Plays as *In Camera*), *Nekrassov* (1955), *Altona* (1960), *Men Without Shadows* (1946), *The Flies* (1942; three plays published in one volume by Penguins in 1962), *The Respectable Prostitute* (1946), and *Lucifer and the Lord* (1951; also published in Penguin Plays). His novels include *Le Nausée* (1938; published in Penguin as *Nausea*), and the trilogy, *Les Chemins de la liberté* (*The Age of Reason* (1945), *The Reprieve* (1947), and *Iron in the Soul* (1949)), also published in Penguins. Sartre's most recent books to be published in England are *Words*, reminiscences of his childhood (1964; available in Penguins), *Baudelaire* (1964), *Saint Genet, Actor and Martyr* (1964), and *Situations*, a volume of essays (1965). His *Literary and Philosophical Essays* were published in 1968.

The Age of Reason

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

TRANSLATED BY
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CHAPTER 1

HALF-WAY down the Rue Vercingétorix, a tall man seized Mathieu by the arm: a policeman was patrolling the opposite pavement.

'Can you spare me a franc or two? I'm hungry.'

His eyes were close-set, his lips were thick, and he smelt of drink.

'You mean you're thirsty?' asked Mathieu.

'No: I'm hungry, and that's God's truth.'

Mathieu found a five-franc piece in his pocket.

'I don't care which you are; it's none of my business,' he said: and gave him the five francs.

'You're a good sort,' said the man, leaning against the wall. 'And now I'd like to wish you something in return. Something you'll be really glad to have. What shall it be?'

They both pondered: then Mathieu said:

'Whatever you like.'

'Well, I wish you good luck. There!'

He laughed triumphantly. Mathieu observed the policeman strolling towards them, and felt sorry for the man.

'Right,' said he. 'So long.'

He was about to pass on, when the man clutched him:

'Good luck isn't enough,' he said in a sodden voice: 'not nearly enough.'

'Well, what then?'

'I'd like to give you something . . .'

'I'll have you locked up for begging,' said the policeman. He was a fresh-faced, youthful officer, and he tried to assume a stern demeanour.

'You've been pestering the passers-by for the last half-hour,' he added, but there was no menace in his voice.

'He wasn't begging,' said Mathieu sharply, 'we were having a little talk.'

The policeman shrugged his shoulders, and walked on. The man was swaying rather precariously: he did not even seem to have seen the policeman.

'I know what I'll give you. I'll give you a Madrid stamp.'

He produced from his pocket a rectangular bit of green card, and handed it to Mathieu. Mathieu read:

'C.N.T. Diario Confederal. Ejemplares 2. France. Anarcho-Syndicalist Committee, 41 Rue de Belleville, Paris II.' Beneath the address there was a stamp. It too was green, and bore the postmark – Madrid. Mathieu reached out a hand:

'Thanks very much.'

'Ah, but look,' said the man angrily. 'It's ... it's Madrid.'

Mathieu looked at him: the man seemed excited, and was plainly struggling to express what was in his mind. He gave it up, and merely said:

'Madrid.'

'Yes.'

'I wanted to get there, and that's the truth. But it couldn't be fixed.'

A gloomy look came over his face, and he said: 'Wait a moment,' and he slid a finger over the stamp.

'All right. You can have it.'

'Thanks.'

Mathieu began to walk on, but the man shouted after him.

'Well?' said Mathieu. The man was holding up the five-franc piece:

'Some guy has just slipped me a five-franc piece. I'll stand you a rum.'

'Not this evening.'

Mathieu moved off with a vague sense of regret. There had been a time in his life when he had strolled about the city and haunted bars in any sort of company, with anyone who cared to ask him. Now it was all over: that game never paid. The fellow had looked decent enough. He had wanted to fight in Spain. Mathieu quickened his step, and he thought irritably: 'Anyway, we hadn't anything to talk about.' He took the green card out of his pocket. 'It comes from Madrid, but it isn't addressed to him. Somebody must have passed it on to him. He kept on fingering it before giving it to me, just because it came from Madrid.' He recalled the man's face, and the look with which he had eyed the stamp: an oddly ardent look. Mathieu in his turn eyed the stamp as he walked on, and then put the bit of cardboard back in his pocket. A railway engine whistled, and Mathieu thought: 'I'm getting old.'

It was twenty-five minutes past ten: Mathieu was before his time. Without stopping, without even turning his head, he passed the little blue house. But he looked at it out of the corner of his eye. All the windows were dark except in Madame Duffet's room. Marcelle hadn't yet had time to open the

outer door: she was leaning over her mother, and those masculine hands of hers were tucking her up into the great testered bed. Mathieu still felt gloomy, the thought in his mind was: 'Five hundred francs until the 29th – thirty francs a day, or rather less. How shall I manage?' He swung round and retraced his steps.

The light had gone out in Madame Duffet's room. In a moment or two the light went up in Marcelle's window. Mathieu crossed the road, and slipped past the grocer's shop, trying to prevent his new shoes from squeaking. The door was ajar: he pushed it very gently and it creaked. 'I'll bring my oilcan on Wednesday and drop a little oil into the hinges.' He went in, closed the door, and took his shoes off in the darkness. The stairs creaked faintly: Mathieu walked cautiously upstairs, shoes in hand, testing each step with his toe before putting his foot down. 'What a game,' he thought.

Marcelle opened her door before he had reached the landing. A pink iris-scented haze from her room pervaded the staircase. She was wearing her green chemise. Through it Mathieu could see the soft rich curve of her hips. He went in: he always felt as though he were entering a huge sea-shell. Marcelle locked the door. Mathieu made his way to the large wall cupboard, opened it, and put his shoes inside; then he looked at Marcelle and saw that there was something the matter.

'What's wrong?' he asked, in a low tone.

'Nothing,' said Marcelle under her breath. 'Are you all right, old boy?'

'I'm broke: otherwise all right.'

He kissed her on the neck and on the lips. Her neck smelt of ambergris, her mouth smelt of cheap cigarettes. Marcelle sat down on the edge of the bed, and gazed at her legs while Mathieu undressed.

'What's that?' asked Mathieu.

There was an unfamiliar photograph on the mantelpiece. He went up to look at it and saw an angular girl, wearing her hair cut like a boy's, and a hard, nervous smile. She was dressed in a man's jacket, and flat-heeled shoes.

'It's me,' said Marcelle, without raising her head.

Mathieu turned round: Marcelle had pulled her vest up over her fleshy thighs: she was leaning forward and beneath her vest Mathieu caught the soft outlines of her rounded breasts.

'Where did you find it?'

'In an album. It was taken in 1928.'

Mathieu carefully folded up his jacket and put it in the cupboard beside his shoes. Then he asked:

'Do you still look at family albums?'

'No, but I had a sort of feeling today that I'd like to remind myself of those times, and see what I was like before I knew you, and when I was always well. Bring it here.'

Mathieu brought it to her, and she snatched it out of his hands. He sat down beside her. She shivered and drew back, eyeing the photograph with a vague smile.

'I *was* a scream in those days,' she said.

The girl was standing stiffly upright, leaning against a garden railing. Her mouth was open: she too was just about to say: 'It's a scream,' with the pert assurance of the Marcelle of today. But – she was young and slim.

Marcelle shook her head.

'Such a scream! It was taken in the Luxemburg by a chemistry student. You see the blouse I'm wearing? I'd bought it that very day, for a trip to Fontainebleau we had fixed for the following Sunday. Good Lord . . . !'

There was certainly something wrong: her gestures had never been so brusque, nor her voice so curt and masculine. She was sitting on the edge of the bed, blankly naked and defenceless, like a great porcelain vase in that dim pink room, and it was almost painful to hear her speak in that masculine voice, and smell the dark, strong odour of her body. Mathieu grasped her shoulders and drew her towards him.

'Do you regret those days?'

'No,' replied Marcelle acidly: 'but I regret the life I might have had.'

She had begun to study chemistry, and had to give it up owing to illness. 'One would think she bears me a grudge for it,' thought Mathieu. He opened his mouth to ask her some more questions, but caught her expression and was silent. She was gazing at the photograph with a sad, intense expression.

'I've got fatter, haven't I?'

'Yes.'

She shrugged her shoulders and flung the photograph on to the bed. 'It's true,' thought Mathieu, 'she's had a rather rotten life.' He tried to kiss her on the cheek, but she drew back, quite gently, laughed nervously, and said:

'That's ten years ago.'

And Mathieu thought: 'I give her nothing.' He came to see

her four nights a week: he told her all his doings in the minutest detail. She gave him advice, in a grave and slightly maternal tone. She often used to say: 'I live by proxy.'

'What did you do yesterday?' he asked her. 'Did you go out?'

Marcelle waved her hand wearily and answered: 'No, I was tired. I read for a bit, but Mother kept on interrupting me about the shop.'

'And today?'

'I did go out today,' said she, gloomily. 'I felt I ought to get some air and see some people in the street. So I walked down as far as the Rue de la Gaité, and enjoyed it; and I wanted to see Andrée.'

'And did you?'

'Yes, for five minutes. Just as I was leaving her, it began to rain; it's a funny sort of day for June, and besides the people looked so hideous. So I took a taxi and came home. What did you do?' she asked nonchalantly.

Mathieu didn't want to tell her. 'Yesterday,' he said, 'I took my last classes at the school. I dined with Jacques, which was as boring as usual. This morning I went to the bursar's office to see if they couldn't advance me something: but apparently it's not done. When I was at Beauvais I always managed to fix it with the bursar. Then I saw Ivich.'

Marcelle raised her eyebrows and looked at him. He didn't like talking to her about Ivich. 'She's a bit under the weather just now.'

'Why?'

Marcelle's voice was steadier, and a sage, masculine sort of look had come into her face. He said with lips half-closed:

'She'll be ploughed in her exam.'

'But you told me she'd been working hard.'

'Well – I daresay she has, in her own way – that is, she no doubt sits for hours over a book. But you know what she's like. She has visions, almost like a lunatic. In October, she was well up in botany, and the examiner was quite satisfied: and then she suddenly *saw* herself opposite a bald chap who was talking about *coelenterata*. This seemed to her just funny, and she thought: "I don't give a curse for *coelenterata*," and the chap couldn't get another word out of her.'

'What an odd little creature she must be,' said Marcelle dreamily.

'Anyway,' said Mathieu, 'I'm afraid she may do it again, or get some fantastic idea into her head.'

His tone, which suggested a sort of protective detachment, was surely intended to mislead. Everything that could be expressed in words, he said. 'But what are words?'

He paused, then hung his head despondently. Marcelle was well aware of his affection for Ivich: she would not in fact have minded if he had been her lover. On one thing only she insisted – that he should talk about Ivich in just that tone. Mathieu had kept on stroking Marcelle's back and her eyelids began to droop; she liked having her back stroked, particularly at the level of her hips and between the shoulder-blades. But she suddenly drew back, and her face hardened, as Mathieu said:

'Look here, Marcelle, I don't care if Ivich is ploughed, she isn't suited to be a doctor any more than I am. In any case, even if she passed the P.C.B., her first dissection would so revolt her that she would never set foot in the place again. But if it doesn't come off this time, she'll do something silly. If she fails, her family won't let her start again.'

'What exact kind of silly thing do you mean?' asked Marcelle in a precise tone.

'I don't know,' he replied, rather crestfallen.

'Ah, I know you only too well, my poor boy. You daren't admit it, but you're afraid that she'll put a bullet through her skin. And the creature pretends to loathe anything romantic. One really might suppose you'd never seen that skin of hers. I wouldn't dare touch it, for fear of scratching it. A doll with a skin like that isn't going to mess it up with a revolver shot. I can quite well picture her prostrate on a chair with her hair all over her face glaring at a neat little Browning in front of her, in the best Russian manner. But anything more – not on your life! Revolvers are meant for crocodile-skins like ours.'

She laid her arms against Mathieu's. He had a whiter skin than hers.

'Just look, darling – especially at mine, it's like morocco leather.' And she began to laugh. 'I would puncture rather well, don't you think? I can picture a nice little round hole under my left breast, with neat, clean, red edges. It wouldn't be at all disfiguring.'

She was still laughing. Mathieu laid a hand over her mouth.

'Be quiet, you'll waken the old lady.'

She was silent, and he said:

'How nervy you are!'

She did not answer. Mathieu laid a hand on Marcelle's leg

and stroked it gently. He loved that soft and buttery skin, its silky down that sent a thousand delicate tremors through his fingers. Marcelle did not move: she looked at Mathieu's hand. And after a while Mathieu took his hand away.

'Look at me,' said he.

For an instant he saw her circled eyes, and in them a flash of haughty desperation.

'What's the matter?'

'Nothing,' she said, turning her head away.

It was always like that with her: she was emotionally constricted. The moment would come when she couldn't contain herself: then she would blurt it out. One could do nothing but mark time until that moment did come. Mathieu dreaded those noiseless explosions: the whispered caution with which passion had to be expressed in that sea-shell room, in order not to awaken Mme Duffet, had always revolted him. Mathieu got up, walked to the cupboard, and took the square of cardboard out of his jacket pocket.

'Look at this.'

'What is it?'

'A fellow gave it to me in the street not long ago. He looked a decent sort, and I gave him a little money.'

Marcelle took the card with an indifferent air. Mathieu felt a tie of something like complicity between himself and the fellow in the street. And he added: 'It meant something to him, you know.'

'Was he an anarchist?'

'I don't know. He wanted to stand me a drink.'

'Did you refuse it?'

'Yes.'

'Why?' asked Marcelle casually. 'You might have found him amusing.'

'Pah!' said Mathieu.

Marcelle raised her head, and peered at the clock with a half smile.

'It's curious,' she said, 'but I hate you to tell me things like that: and God knows there are enough of them at the moment. Your life is full of missed opportunities.'

'You call that a missed opportunity.'

'Yes. There was a time when you would go out of your way to meet such people.'

'I dare say I've changed a bit,' said Mathieu, good-humouredly. 'What do you think? Am I getting old?'

'You're thirty-four,' said Marcelle soberly.

Thirty-four. Mathieu thought of Ivich, and was conscious of a slight shock of annoyance.

'Yes... But I don't think it's age: it's a sort of fastidiousness. I wouldn't have been in the mood.'

'You very seldom are, nowadays,' said Marcelle.

'And he wouldn't have been either,' added Mathieu briskly. 'When a man gets drunk he gets sentimental. That's what I wanted to avoid.'

And he thought to himself: 'That isn't altogether true. I didn't really look at it like that.' He wanted to make an effort to be sincere. Mathieu and Marcelle had agreed that they would always tell each other everything.

'The fact is – ' he began.

But Marcelle had begun to laugh: a low, rich, cooing laugh, as though she were stroking his hair and saying: 'Poor old boy.' But she did not look at all affectionate.

'That's very like you,' said she. 'You're so afraid of anything sentimental! Supposing you had got a little sentimental with that poor lad, would it have mattered?'

'Well, it wouldn't have done me any good.'

He was trying to defend himself against himself.

Marcelle smiled a frosty smile. 'She wants to draw me,' thought Mathieu, rather disconcerted. He was feeling peaceably inclined, and puzzled: he was in fact in a good temper, and didn't want an argument.

'Look here,' said he. 'You're quite wrong to catch me up like this. In the first place, I hadn't the time. I was on my way here.'

'You're quite right,' said Marcelle. 'It's nothing. Absolutely nothing, really: not enough to get a cat into trouble... But all the same it's symptomatic.'

Mathieu started: if only she wouldn't use such tiresome words.

'Really, really,' he said. 'I can't imagine why it should interest you.'

'Well, it's that same frankness you fuss about so much. You're so absurdly scared of being your own dupe, my poor boy, that you would back out of the finest adventure in the world rather than risk telling yourself a lie.'

'Quite true, and you know it,' said Mathieu. 'But that's an old story.'

He thought her unfair. 'Frankness' – he detested the word, but Marcelle had acquired it some while back. The winter before, it had been 'urgency' (words did not last her for much more than

a season), they had grown into the habit of it together, they felt mutually responsible for maintaining it – indeed it was, actually, the inner meaning of their love. When Mathieu had pledged himself to Marcelle, he had forever renounced all thoughts of solitude, those cool thoughts, a little shadowy and timorous, that used to dart into his mind with the furtive vivacity of fish. He could not love Marcelle save in complete frankness: she *was* his frankness embodied, his comrade, his witness, his counsellor, and his critic.

'If I lied to myself,' said he, 'I should have the feeling I was lying to you as well. And I couldn't bear that.'

'Yes,' said Marcelle; but she did not look as if she believed him.

'You don't look as if you believed me?'

'Oh yes I do,' she said, nonchalantly.

'You think I'm lying to myself?'

'No – anyway, one can't ever know. But I don't think so. Still, do you know what I do believe? That you are beginning to sterilize yourself a little. I thought that today. Everything is so neat and tidy in your mind: it smells of clean linen: it's as though you had just come out of a drying-cupboard. But there's a want of shade. There's nothing useless, nor hesitant, nor underhand about you now. It's all high noon. And don't tell me this is all for my benefit. You're moving down your own incline: you've acquired the taste for self-analysis.'

Mathieu was disconcerted. Marcelle was often rather hard: she remained always on guard, a little aggressive, a little suspicious, and if Mathieu didn't agree with her, she often thought he was trying to dominate her. But he had rarely met her in such a resolve to be disagreeable. And then there was that photo on the bed. He eyed Marcelle: the moment had not yet come when she could be induced to speak.

'I'm not so much interested in myself as all that,' he said simply.

'I know,' said Marcelle. 'It isn't an aim, it's a means. It helps you to get rid of yourself; to contemplate and criticize yourself: that's the attitude you prefer. When you look at yourself, you imagine you aren't what you see, you imagine you are nothing. That is your ideal: you want to be nothing.'

'To be nothing?' repeated Mathieu slowly. 'No, it isn't. Listen. I... I recognize no allegiance except to myself.'

'Yes – you want to be free. Absolutely free. It's your vice.'

'It's not a vice,' said Mathieu. 'It's... what else can a man do?'