

the sand dab is just as dumb. We fish side by side, Marthe and I, and the same yelp escapes from both of us when the catch is good.

11:30 A.M.—The sun bakes our napes, our shoulders emerging from the warm and caustic water. The waves, under our tired gazes, dance in blue-green moiré patterns, in gold rings, in broken necklaces. Ouch, my back! I look for my mute companions: The Silent One arrives, just like Marthe, completely beat, and groans, “I’m hungry!” The Silent One smokes, and his huge cigar only leaves him enough room for a proud smile. He holds out to us his shrimp net overflowing with live mother-of-pearl.

Now it’s Maggie’s turn to come back, delighted with herself. She has caught seven shrimp and a baby sole.

“Time for soup, kids!” yells Marthe. The natives transport the catch to the car.

“Are we taking it all? There’s at least fifty pounds!”

“First of all, it boils down a lot when you cook it. We’ll eat some fried tonight, tomorrow morning with grated cheese on top, tomorrow night in a court bouillon. So we’ll cook some ourselves, and maybe give some to the neighbors.”

1:00 P.M.—Seated in a tent, we eat lunch, gradually sobering up. Down there, at the bottom of the blinding and shadowless desert, something boils mysteriously, purrs, and comes closer—the sea! Champagne doesn’t galvanize us, a headache hovers over our hardworking heads.

We contemplate one another without generosity. Marthe has gotten sunburnt on her little bulldog nose. The Silent One yawns and chews his fifth cigar. Maggie shocks us a bit, too white and too naked in her raspberry suit.

“What is that smell?” Marthe shouts. “It stinks of musk, and I don’t know what else.”

“It’s the fish. The nets are hanging over there, full!”

“My hands stink, too. It’s the flounder that smells musky and rotten. What if we give a little bit of fish to the nice natives?”

2:00 P.M.—Mournful trip home. We’re secretly sniffing our hands. Everything smells like raw fish: the cigar of The Silent One, Maggie’s suit, Marthe’s moist hair. The west wind, soft and burning, smells like fish. The car exhaust, and the dune glazed with blue shadows, and this whole day, it all smells of fish.

3:00 P.M.—Back home. The villa smells like fish.

Fierce, nauseated, Marthe shuts herself in her room. The cook knocks on her door:

“Would Madame tell me if she wants the sand dabs fried or with grated cheese tonight?”

A door bursts open furiously and Marthe’s voice vociferates:

“Do me a favor and make all that sea crap disappear from this house. And for the next week, I forbid you to serve anything but soft-boiled eggs and roast chicken!”

—Translated from the French  
by Zack Rogow and Renée Morel

**Colette** (1873–1954) wrote many novels, including *Gigi* and *Chéri*, made into popular movies. This story is taken from *Shipwrecked on a Traffic Island and Other Previously Untranslated Gems*, a collection to be published by SUNY Press in November 2014.

**Zack Rogow’s** is the poetry editor of *Catamaran Literary Reader*. His translations from the French include work by André Breton, George Sand, and Marcel Pagnol. He has received the PEN/Book-of-the-Month Club Translation Prize, and teaches in the low-residency MFA in writing program at the University of Alaska, Anchorage. Rogow is the author, editor, or translator of twenty books or plays.

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## SEFLA JOSEPH

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