

Sample Translation of

On the Edge of Happiness. Along the Beach

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Scheveningen

“But otherwise, the little storm raged on.”

A boy in a bright blue swimsuit sits on the beach. He absent-mindedly scoops up the sand and lets it trickle onto the heap before him, which now has a sloping point. It is an unremarkable gesture one can observe frequently among beachgoers, an expression of gentle languor, when their hands have nothing else to do than measure the sand like hourglasses. The sand in Scheveningen is especially suited to this: it is fine and very pale, and when it is dry, it forms a greyish-white expanse of gentle mounds that glisten in the sun, and into which one can sink. When it is wet, because of the tide or rain, the sand is brown, heavy, and lined with uneven grooves at the water's edge into which the ocean laps at its own rhythm, each wave anew. The sand where the young boy is sitting is dry, and he is not looking at his hands but sometimes up at the ocean and the beach around him, quite still, resting within himself. No one is bothering him, no one is calling for him. His parents are somewhere among the colorful bathers lying beneath the umbrellas slightly further away and look up from time to time to check whether the boy is still there. But not to worry: there he is.

Like everywhere on the Dutch coast, the beach at Scheveningen is wide and flat up to the boardwalk, and even at high tide, there is plenty of room for all sorts of visitors: wanderers of the shoreline and those who want to rest. Young people sit on beach towels, old people on folding chairs they have brought with them, with their

families, alone, or in pairs, always turned towards the North Sea, which peacefully laps the shore in grey-green waves. By the water, a group of kindergartners is focused intently on digging a semicircular canal. They are wearing neon vests and hats so no child will go astray. Most people have found spots close to the spa hotel and De Pier, the narrow pier that houses a food court with a Ferris wheel at its end. The beach clubs, which vie among themselves for the title of most desirable, are close by and advertise with exotic names, wood, metal, and soft cushions with sand in their creases. Colorful cocktails glisten in the sun; the air smells of weed, barbecue, and *patat*, Dutch fries. But the young boy seems uninterested. His pile of sand is steadily growing, and I would like to know what he's thinking. I'm sure he's not asking himself any big questions that could tear him out of his absent-minded reverie. *Will I remember this day at the beach one day? Why am I sitting at the beach with no cares in the world? What is a beach, anyways?*

The answer to this last question is simultaneously simple and complicated. It is simple when you ask a geologist. I let myself be blown towards the south, to the fishing village that Scheveningen was for centuries. I mull over the German word in my mind: *Strand, Strand, Strand*. If you say it enough, it will begin to sound curious, foreign, and you will begin to ask yourself what sort of word this is anyway, with three consonants to stumble over right at the beginning, and—if we're being honest—which isn't exactly among the most beautiful words in the German language. It's no coincidence that it is spelled identically in almost all Germanic languages but pronounced differently. While the Germans say *sh-trand*, the Dutch

and the Swedes pronounce it as it is written—*s-trand*—while in Iceland, you go to the *s-trönd*. Once you have mentally traveled to the far north, you have found where the word comes from. Sailors brought it back from their travels to Scandinavia in the thirteenth century. At that time, people were more likely to use the words for bank or shore in German, but *Strand* made the rounds and appeared in print shortly thereafter. Nikolaus von Jeroschin's fourteenth-century Chronicle of the Prussian Land declaims, in exquisite Middle High German: "bi einem wazzirvlize na / daz ist genant di Treidera, / uf des meris strande." (By a river named Treidera, at the ocean's strand.) Romance and Slavic languages, in contrast, derive their words for *Strand* from *plaga*, the Latin word for space or region, which becomes *plage* in French, *playa* in Spanish, *spiagga* in Italian, and *plyaj* in Russian. And, lastly, there is the English *beach*, which has long found a home in all the languages of the world. *Beach* refers less to the solid shore than the lapping water, since it derives from the Old English *bece*, which means river, and is related to the German *Bach* and the Dutch *beek*. The word *strand* does exist in English, but only in Ireland is it used to mean the sandy strip of land by the ocean. When the British hear *strand*, they may think of a street in London, which connected the city of London to the city of Westminster in the Middle Ages and runs along the banks of the Thames before the river is walled in by quays. The Strand has its place in literary history, because dozens of booksellers and publishers settled there in the nineteenth century and attracted famous writers of the day, including George Eliot, who lived there, and Virginia Woolf, who enjoyed strolling down it. And when Benjamin Bass, a Lithuanian immigrant, opened a bookstore in New York's East Village in 1927, he

named it after that legendary street in London: The Strand Bookstore. This store, which has the longest bookshelves in New York City, has since become a legend of its own.