

The story begins with the couple on a business trip through Algeria by bus. It is here that we first learn of the strained relationship between Marcel and Janine. In her thoughts Janine portrays a negative image of her husband who she sees as inert and tied up with his work, having relinquished the passions and ambitions that he possessed as a youth when they met. Janine sees herself as still being attractive in a mature way and reminisces about her adolescence.

Also, a French Algerian soldier is on the bus. The soldier seems interested in Janine, letting it be noticed that he is looking at her and offers her a lozenge from a box in his pocket. Janine welcomes the soldier's attention and this reinforces Janine's opinion that she can still be attractive to men but feels dejected when later nothing comes of it.

The couple stop at a hotel for the night and decide to visit a nearby fort. At the fort Janine feels inspired and is excited by the experience. Marcel contrastingly is totally unmoved and convinces his wife that they should get out of the cold.

Once back at the hotel, Marcel falls asleep in their room. Janine cannot sleep. After consideration, she decides to sneak out of their room that night and return to the fort alone. Once at the fort Janine is overcome with an even stronger feeling of excitement and freedom than when she had sex with her husband. At this point the narrative becomes increasingly dramatic and sensual as Janine runs around the fort feeling charged with life, eventually ending up lying on her back beneath the stars.

Back at the hotel, Marcel wakes up and Janine breaks down into tears. Janine insists that it's nothing and never tells her husband about her frustration or her trip to the fort.