A GOOD YEAR

screenplay by

Marc Klein

Based on the novel by Peter Mayle
EXT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - LATE AFTERNOON

A rustic Provencal farmhouse, surrounded by rows of well-kept vines. Up above, the sky is a sparkling jewelbox of stars. Down below, all is quiet, except for the chirrup of the cigales...

EXT. FARMHOUSE - GARDEN - SAME

A gorgeous trellis of jasmine and honeysuckle is lit by a pair of flickering candles. Beneath it, MAX SKINNER, age 12, sits alone, puffing a cigar while staring at a chess board, pondering his next move. An old radio broadcasts in French...

FRENCH DJ
La prochaine chanson est exécutée
ce soir par Jospine Baker...

MAX
(practicing French)
La pro-shane...shan-sone...est ex-é-
cu-tée...

Josephine Baker's "Breezin' Along With the Breeze" comes on...as Max's eyes drift across the garden--

MAX'S POV - ENTRANCE TO THE WINE CELLAR

A shaft of light spills out from the cellar. Downstairs, we can HEAR wine bottles being moved and RATTLED.

BACK TO SCENE

Max taps his ash. His eyes anxiously dart between the chessboard and the cellar entrance. Finally, with the ease of an experienced con artist, Max slides his bishop one square forward...just as he hears footsteps climbing the stairs. Max quickly crosses his arms, resuming his pose of deep contemplation.

THE WINE CELLAR

Emerging from the cellar is Max's UNCLE HENRY, early-50's. Uncle Henry is a sermonizing eccentric, with warm, knowing eyes, and the countenance of a man who hasn't worked very hard for a very long time. He wears a pair of pajamas -- shirt-top opened, revealing a round Buddha belly. He puffs on a cigar, as he crosses the lawn, swinging a bottle of red...
UNCLE HENRY
Max my boy -- seeing that it's your
last night here, I thought it only
appropriate that we open something
extra special...
He presents the wine with the flourish of a waiter.

UNCLE HENRY
Tempier Bandol. 1969. The kind of wine that’ll pickle even the toughest of men... I once saw a Castilian prizefighter collapse into a heap after drinking just a single glass. Of course, my knee landing squarely on his testicles may have been partly to blame.

He begins opening the bottle.

UNCLE HENRY
What was I talking about before?

MAX
Blue suits.

UNCLE HENRY
Blue suits?

MAX
You said the importance of a good blue suit can never be overstated.

UNCLE HENRY
Quite right. A blue suit is the most versatile of accoutrements... But even more important than the suit itself is the tailor who fits it for you. Take note, Max: once you find a good tailor, you’re not to give his name away -- not even under the threat of bodily harm.

Uncle Henry pours a glass for himself. One for Max. Then spills a little water into Max’s glass, just to soften it a bit. He takes a seat.

UNCLE HENRY
Now where were we? Whose turn is it?

MAX
Mine.

Uncle Henry suspiciously studies the board. He quickly suspects that Max has moved his bishop.
UNCLE HENRY
Max, have I told you why I enjoy making wine so much?
MAX
You don't make the wine, Uncle
Henry, that guy Duflot does.

Max points out to the vineyard...where -- far off -- a lone
FIGURE rides a tractor across the land...

UNCLE HENRY
You're starting to sound like a
communist, Max. In France, it's
always the landowner that makes the
wine, even if all he does is
supervise with binoculars from the
comfort of his study...

(swirls his wine)
Now then -- I enjoy making wine
because this sublime nectar is,
quite simply, incapable of lying.
You see Max, all the work we do
here at La Sirogue -- all the
planting, all the harvesting, all
the fermenting -- it's nothing more
than the art of bottling truth.
Par example: if perchance one year
it rains too much, the wine will
tell you that very easily, by the
depth of it's color...

(holds the wine up to a
candle)
And if it rains too little, it'll
tell you that too...in it's aroma
and bouquet...

(sniffs the wine)
Pick too early, pick too late, it
matters not -- the wine will always
whisper into your mouth with
complete, unabashed honesty, every
time you take a sip...

(takes a sip)
Ahhh... Delightful.

(then; serious)
So Max-a-million...now that you
know why I love wine so much, do
you have something you want to tell
me...?

Max looks at his Uncle, poker-faced. Then down at the chess
board.

MAX
Yes. I do.
UNCLE HENRY
Well...what is it?

Max gulps his wine. Then, moves his bishop--
MAX
Checkmate.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. LONDON - LAWTON BROTHERS OFFICE BUILDING - MORNING

A three-story glass and concrete box at the top end of Threadneedle Street. A title reads:

MANY VINTAGES LATER...

INT. LAWTON BROTHERS - BOND TRADING BULLPEN - MORNING

A platoon of young, Saville Row-draped BOND TRADERS sit at their desks -- uncharacteristically quiet. They wear the faces of soldiers who are about to enter battle. KENNY, an overly-eager Australian trader, 20's, eyes his computer.

KENNY
115.10, Max. Feels like we oughta move now.

Kenny glances across the bullpen to his boss, the team's Managing Director. It's MAX SKINNER, almost 40. Max is a handsome, self-absorbed, rascal of a man whose desire to win knows no limits. He sits with his feet up on his desk, wearing an exquisitely tailored blue suit, reading the Financial Times.

MAX
Not yet, Alf.

KENNY
Boss, why do you keep calling me Alf?

MAX
Because you're an Aggressive Little F'er, Kenny. And as your boss, and genetic superior, I can call you what I like. Now let the price come to you...not the other way around.

A phone RINGS. Max's assistant answers. She is GEMMA TAYLOR, mid-20's, a bright and attractive Englishwoman with a playful, oftentimes abusive, wit.
GEMMA
Max Skinner's desk.
(beat)
One moment please.
(to Max)
It's Kimberly.
Max gives her the "thumbs down".

GEMMA
(onto phone)
Sorry Kimberly, Mr. Skinner isn't here. He and his fiancee are at their wedding rehearsal today...

KENNY
115.40?

The team snaps into gear and awaits Max's signal. Max watches the price of the bond on his screen...

MAX
Okay people...just remember: we're not here for the dental plan. At my signal, unleash hell...

Max stands. Walks to the window. Stares across the City to a sleek, Girkin building: Lustig Bank...his competitor.

KENNY
115.50.

MAX
That's it! Go!

INT. STOCK EXCHANGE - CITY

Lots of men respond immediately...frantic tick tack business.

INT. LONDON - LUSTIG BANK - BOND TRADING FLOOR - SAME

It's a slow summer morning. Not much activity. CAMERA MOVES IN on...AMIS RADFORD, 40's -- a scrappy East Ender with a neck thicker than a Redwood tree. He glances at his computer screen, bewildered.

AMIS
That miserable sod. Skinner's dumping bonds onto the European market.

TRADER
He can't do that -- there's a gentleman's agreement on the MTS exchange.
AMIS
A gentleman’s agreement presupposes there’s a gentleman involved.
TRADER #1
Amis, he’s put out three billion in sell orders! Prices are crashing!

AMIS
Get off your arses people -- we’ve got to cover our positions!

SERIES OF SHOTS
Every BOND FLOOR in London is in chaos, as TRADERS shout and frantically try to stem their losses...

INT. LAWTON BROTHERS - A BIT LATER

MAX
Where we at?

KENNY
Down two big figures, 113.50!

INT. LUSTIG BANK - SAME

Headset on, Amis stares out the window, across the City to the Lawton Brothers skyscraper...muttering to himself...

AMIS
This whole thing doesn’t make any sense. Unless...

INT. LAWTON BROTHERS - SAME

Max watches the bond price hit 112.50, then leaps out of his chair--

MAX
Start buying! Everything you can get your hands on! Go! Go! Go!

The bullpen erupts into chaos. The CAMERA CLOSES in on Max, who flashes a satisfied, devious grin...
AMIS
(panicked)
Mother Mary, that filthy bugger forced down prices, now he's gonna buy everything back on the cheap!
INT. LAWTON BROTHERS - SAME

GEMMA
You've gone too far this time, Max.

MAX
(braggart)
Gemma, when they hang me, make sure they bury me face down so I know which way I'm headed...

INT. LAWTON BROTHERS "CIRCUS CLUB" - MINUTES LATER

The place is filled with plasma screens that broadcast business reports from all over the world, as well as health food counters. The gang from Lawton Brothers serenades its leader, soft drinks swinging in the air, as Max cracks some "illegal" bottles of bubbly into plastic cups.

GANG
" -- for he's a jolly good fell--
ohhh! Which nobody can deny!"

-- then, with the tiniest of voices --

GEMMA
I can!

Applause, cheers and (much to Max's consternation) calls for "Speech! Speech!" Max steps atop a chair.

MAX
Were you not entertained!? WERE!
YOU! NOT! ENTERTAINED!

The mob cheers. Max settles them with aplomb.

MAX
Well. Today, I think we proved that old adage correct: "Winning isn't everything..."

ALL IN UNISON
...IT'S THE ONLY THING!"

MAX
Great work today, everybody!
Really. Thank you for it!

Max applauds his team...and makes brief eye contact with a TWENTYSOMETHING BEAUTY across the space.
MAX
Our competitors will say that what we did today exploited a loophole. That we "crossed a line" and broke a "sacred covenant of trust" within the bond trading fraternity. Well, to them I respectfully say: (as erudite as possible) "Ha -- ha!"

Big cheers. It's good to be Max Skinner.

10A
INT. SMALL FLAT - BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

Post-coitus. The Twentysomething Beauty lies naked on the bed, snoring, her sumptuous body tangled within the sheets. Max, gripping his clothes in a ball, creeps out of the apartment, checking his hair in the mirror before he leaves.

10B
INT. TOWN CAR - NIGHT

In the back, Max, bleary-eyed, watches a mini-TV as he's chauffeured home.

CNN NEWS ANCHOR
(London markets)
...and while not technically illegal, Lawton Brothers' actions this morning represented an unprecedented breach of financial etiquette. Cries of 'foul play' were loud and widespread...with talks of some kind of inquiry...

Max frowns, dismissive, clicks off.

1
EXT. LONDON STREETS - WET - DAWN

A sleek apartment building sits on the edge of the Thames, shrouded in a gloomy soup of drizzle and fog. Max's Town Car glides up in front.

1
INT. MAX'S APARTMENT BUILDING - WEE HOURS - MOMENTS LATER

A DOORMAN opens the door as Max enters, briefcase in tow.
DOORMAN
Good morning, Mr. Skinner...
(handing Max his mail)
And congratulations.
MAX
Thank you, Bert.

DOORMAN
You mighta tipped me off, Mr. Skinner.

MAX
Buy on the rumor, Bert... sell on the now.

As the elevator doors shut.

DOORMAN
(sotto)
Tosser!

MAX
(sotto)
Wanker!

INT. MAX’S APARTMENT - DAWN

The flat is sleek, modern, expensively appointed. Walls of glass give the impression that the place is literally floating in the foggy, dawn sky. Gekko’s “Greed is Good” quote is framed on canvas, dominating the largest wall...

Max skims through his mail. It’s mostly junk, but there’s one intriguing envelope with a French stamp.

At a wet bar, Max pours himself a tumbler of scotch, decanter in one hand. Appraising the letter: CABINET Auzet, Notaires, Rue Des Remparts, 84160, Gordes.

Max opens the letter... his reaction is to walk through to the living room a little crestfallen.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME - DAWN

At his window, he stares out across the Thames, grief in his eyes. He downs his scotch.

MAX
(quiet)
Ah, hell... Henry.

Along the river, the lights go out, signaling a new morning.
INT. MAX'S OFFICE - THE FOLLOWING DAY

A massive fish tank. Max leans against it, reading the morning's Financial Times, whose headline blares: "LAWTON SCORES BIG IN DAWN RAID." Kenny arrives in the frame, handing Max a shot of espresso, waving Max's morning messages...

KENNY
Ready for the fan mail?
(Max nods)
"Bastard." "Bastard." "Burn in hell." "Rot in hell." "Die."
"Congratulations, you're my hero."

MAX
Who was that from?

KENNY
Your attorney.

Max looks up. Gemma taps on glass from inside Max's office.

INT. MAX'S OFFICE - SAME

GEMMA
I just got off the phone with Auzet, the notaire handling your Uncle Henry's estate.

MAX
(blanking)
Oh! The one who sent me the letter.

GEMMA
Seems your uncle hadn't updated his will in over twenty years. Which is why, in typical French fashion, it took them a month to notify you.

MAX
So? Is there going to be a reading of the will or do we just "download" that sort of thing these days?

GEMMA
That's the point, Max: there is no legal will.

(MORE)
GEMMA (cont'd)
You're his closest blood relative, so you get everything.
MAX
(dissinterested)
What -- his clothes and LPs?

GEMMA
(following)
The house, you git. You get his
house.

As Max digests that, Kenny enters behind her.

MAX
(touched marginally)
The old farmhouse? The pool and
vineyard and everything?

KENNY
(intrusively)
A place like that must be worth a
pretty penny these days, eh?

Max look at him, annoyed at the intrusion.

GEMMA
I booked you a flight and made an
appointment with Auzet for three
tomorrow afternoon. Just a few
papers to sign.

MAX
Right... Wait! What, no! I'm not
going to France tomorrow, Gem. I'm
the toast of the town. I need to
take a few victory laps around the
city.
   (waving his phone messages
   proudly as evidence)
See -- everybody hates me.

KENNY
Go on, Max. We'll take good care
of the place while you're gone. No
worries.

Max inspects the ambitious little shit beside him, then hands * him his expresso--

MAX
Go, there must be animals you can
kick somewhere -- go, get
your... back waxed.

He shuts the door behind him. Gemma faces him.
GEMMA
Tell me something, Max: did you care for him?
MAX

Who?

GEMMA

Your uncle, of course.

Max has to give this pause.

GEMMA

When was the last time you spoke?

MAX

Ages ago.

GEMMA

Why?

MAX

Don’t know really. I think it had something to do with my becoming an asshole.

---

EXT. EVENING - BERKELEY SQUARE - DRIZZLE

Max strides with his umbrella, under the trees.

INT. HIP RESTAURANT - CORNER BOOTH - NIGHT

Swarms of Notting Hill lovelies fill the restaurant. Max enters, and skillfully wades his way through the crowd of admiring women, kissing many, whispering to others...

Meanwhile, CHARLIE WILLIS, mid-30’s, real estate broker, casts furtive glances at his WAITRESS’s pert bosom while she pours him a taste of red wine.

CHARLIE

Looks lovely, thank you.
(Another glance at them)
Really, really lovely.

Max slides into the booth, and watches, amused, as Charlie begins a pretentious "tasting" ritual.

CHARLIE

First, the pleasure of the eyes; by way of an inspection of the polyphenolics...

He tilts the glass to observe its color.
CHARLIE
Magnificent hues of brick red indicating a mature Bordeaux.
WAITRESS
It's a Burgundy.

CHARLIE
(coversing)
Slip of the tongue... Next, the
retro-nasal cavity...

He swirled the wine gently, then dips his nose into the glass. He inhales, but accidentally snorts up some wine, and he coughs and chokes for a moment.

CHARLIE
Marvelous...
(cough)
...bouquet. Alluring nose of...
(cough, cough)
...honey and spice...

MAX
It's coming out of your ears, Charlie.

Charlie trills, then swallows the wine, eyes leaden with resplendent joy.

CHARLIE
Mmmmm...
(to Waitress)
That'll do nicely. You can let it breathe for a while...
(catches himself)
No, wait, we can do better than that -- you can let it... regain it's composure.

MAX
While I regain mine.

WAITRESS
(to Max)
Wine for you, sir?

MAX
A Rémy-Martín, a double, please.

CHARLIE
(to her, with one final glance, which Max clocks)
Thank you.
MAX
Charlie, you should try and keep your eyes more...up. Makes her think you have serious intentions.

CHARLIE
(following her ass as it struts away)
Oh, but I do, Max, I do...

MAX
So, mate...what do you think I’ll get for it?

CHARLIE
(affronted)
Max, barely a day since you learned your long-lost Uncle croaked, and still, the only thing on your mind is money.

MAX
The very Uncle you speak of once taught me that every man needs an "f-you million" in the bank. I’ve simply decided that I want to say "f-you" more than once. Several times, in fact.

CHARLIE
At least furnish me the particulars. An estate agent needs something he can sink his teeth into.

Max grabs a hunk of bread. Starts nibbling.

MAX
It’s been a while since I’ve been there, mind you... But I think there were about a half dozen bedrooms. A decent-sized kitchen. A pool. A tennis court. Oh yeah, there’s also the vineyard. About eleven hectares.

CHARLIE
Bloody hell, Max. Sounds like an estate to me. A chateau.

MAX
Yeah? What’s a chateau goin’ for these days?
Charlie muses over the image of a Provencal palace, as he sniffs his wine.
CHARLIE
A few "f-you's." Maybe more.

MAX
(delighted)
Bless that old sod!

CHARLIE
I won't cut my commission.

MAX
I didn't ask you to.

CHARLIE
In that case...
(holds up his glass)
...here's to f-ing you.

CUT TO:

18
OMITTED

18

EXT. MARIGNANE AIRPORT - DAY

Max emerges from the terminal to be overwhelmed by sunlight. He squints, then takes out his Treo to check e-mail, never pausing to regard the cloudless miles of sky above.

20
AT A CAR RENTAL LOT - MARSEILLE - SUNSHINE

Max, passport in his mouth and carrying a briefcase, prowls the stalls, checking the number on his rental key against the space numbers beneath sporty Peugeots and Renaulds. At last, he comes to his car: a tiny, lime-green Smart Car. He thinks about the hassle of changing vehicles...half turns back, then settles for it.

MAX
(squeezing in)
Dammit, Gemma!

1
EXT. ROAD - FREEWAY N7 - DAY

Max's Smart Car scoots along the freeway passing magnificent landscape.
INSIDE

Max doesn't notice outside, he's struggling with the GPS as it repeats itself.
GPS VOICE (O.S.)
Bonjour et bienvenue. Ça c'est la
système du position globale.

Max stabs at the control panel in frustration.

MAX
(shouting)
English, please!

EXT. BEAUTIFUL ROAD WITH MAJESTIC TREES - DAY
Max's car toddles around the bend.

INSIDE
Max drives. Eyes on road. Ear to phone.

MAX
(into phone)
Kenny. I want the current 10 year
yield. I want an update on the
figures for non-farm payrolls. And
I want you out of my chair.

INT. LONDON - LAWTON BROTHERS - SAME
Kenny sits there, in Max's chair, feet on the desk. He hangs
up.

KENNY
How'd he know that?

Glances round the room for hidden cameras...
EXT. ROAD - MOVING

Max passes a French, testosterone bicycle club who all grin and jeer at the little car. Max fingers them through the roof as he goes by...

MAX
LANCE ARMSTRONG!

They all finger back, etc...

EXT. HIGH TECH FLOWER STALL - DAY


MAX (O.S.)
Admit it. This is because I didn’t bang you on your birthday.

GEMMA
I swear on my life Max they didn’t have any other cars.
(winks to her friend)
So where are we?

EXT. PROVENCE PANORAMA - DAY

Beautiful patchwork vista of Menerbes. A small green speck stops at a crossroads, otherwise there is no movement in the landscape.

V.O., then cut into Max.

MAX
Below the Luberon with Saint-Pons to the north. The sign says Saint-Pons to the south. And the GPS has a slight stutter.

GPS VOICE (O.S.)
...avancez...avancez...

EXT. LONDON - SAME

Gemma studying her Treo.
GEMMA

Turn left. That'll put you back on the N7. If you really motor you'll still make your appointment...
EXT. WIDE SHOT - PROVENCE - SAME

Max makes the turn... following her directions...

EXT. LONDON - TRENDY CAFE - MINUTES LATER

Gemma’s sitting under an awning having a fag and cappuccino when her phone rings.

GEMMA
Mission control?

BACK IN FRANCE - BEAUTIFUL DIRT ROAD - TREE AND VINEYARD AND CASTLE - PARADISE

Max stands outside his car, surveying his problem.

MAX (O.S.)
(agitated)
Gemma. Please call the notaire and have her leave the keys underneath the big stone beside the entrance. We’ll have to reschedule for first thing tomorrow morning.

EXT. TRENDY CAFE - SAME

GEMMA
Copy that. Max, where are you? What’s that noise?

EXT. ROAD - SAME

His head turns to see--

MAX
Your replacement.

A BRAYING DONKEY BLOCKING HIS PATH.

EXT. PROVENCE - RURAL ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON

Max, now seriously irritated...

GPS VOICE
...avancez...avancez...tournez a droite a 100 metres...
Max passes a driveway with twin pillars. A faded bronze plaque: 'CHATEAU LA STROQUE.' He stops, backs up the car, and stares at the sign. This is it.
EXT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE ESTATE - LATE AFTERNOON

Max pulls up in front of a sprawling house. A little run-down and in need of a coat of paint but nevertheless familiar. He turns off his motor. Steps out, and feels like the only human being for miles. It's very, very quiet.

He locks the Smart Car. CRUNCH, CRUNCH, CRUNCH, CRUNCH...
He walks past the table where he and his Uncle used to play chess. He touches it as he passes.

-- WE VIEW MAX FROM AFAR, OVER SOMEONE’S SHOULDER. Max’s being spied on, by --

-- FRANCIS DUFLOT, sweat-stained and sunburned, years of toil etched in his face. He sits on an idling tractor which is dripping with fresh, blue pesticide. Cell phone to his ear.

DUFLOT
Il est arrive...

EXT. COTTAGE - FAR END OF THE VINEYARD - ESTABLISHING

Smoke drifts from the chimney...

INT. COTTAGE - SAME

Standing above the hot stove, also staring out at the bastide, is LUDIVINE DUFLOT, 40’s. She’s on the phone with her husband....

MADAME DUFLOT
(warning)
Be nice, Francis. Don’t go with a face like a boot, go with a smile.

EXT. BASTIDE - DRIVEWAY

Max crosses the gravel driveway. Lifts the stone beside the entrance and unearths a pair of huge brass keys.

INT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - ENTRY - LATE AFTERNOON

A key rattles in the door -- CLICK -- Magic hour sunlight spills in, framing Max in the doorway. He breathes a wave of nostalgia. The old, familiar smell.
MAX
Halloo? 'Allo?
(them, experimentally)
Uncle Henry?

Of course, no answer. He passes a picture of Henry and his younger self barefoot, crushing grapes and laughing.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Max stands in a kitchen with a cast-iron range and a big wooden plank table. From a bowl, Max plucks a ripe tomato; someone's been keeping up the place.

EXT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - GARDEN - SAME

Max, without tie and jacket, takes in the air, not savoring it so much as detecting a change from London. He bites into the tomato...SQUIRT!...unaware that he has stained his white shirt.

AT THE POOL

Drained, with a layer of leaves and slime coating the bottom, a diving board balances on rusted springs. Walking out onto the board and Max gives a little bounce. It's gives a THUDDER. He jumps again. THUDDER THUD. Grins.

Max's POV: a derelict tennis court is raised on a bank above the old pool. The THUD of the board transforms into a tennis game's plop-thwang, plop-thwang, plop-thwang...distant arguments, protests, etc.

EXT. TENNIS COURT - SECONDS LATER

It's a weedy clay court, surrounded by a rusted fence. The court is covered with leaves from a tree that's been planted on the edge. The tree spreads dappled shadows across the court. In the distance, Max steps through the rotting gate and takes in the scene, a surge of nostalgia bubbling up...

UNCLE HENRY VOICE
Match point, Max!

WE ARE NOW IN A FLASHBACK...
MAX'S POV - ON HIS LEFT AT THE FAR END

UNCLE HENRY -- wearing too-tight Dunlop shorts and a pair of ratty sandals -- stands holding a tennis racket in one hand, and a glass of white wine in the other.
MAX'S POV - ON HIS LEFT

YOUNG MAX -- wearing a headband and wristbands and looking like a pint-sized version of John McEnroe, bad tempered.

    YOUNG MAX
    It's too dark to play Uncle Henry!  
    I can't see!

    UNCLE HENRY
    Nonsense, Max, at your age I could spot a hyena on the veldt at three quarters of a mile.

Uncle Henry lines up his serve. THWACK! Dead-center. Max lunges for the ball as if his life depended on it, but misses anyway.

    UNCLE HENRY
    Ace!  Game, set, match!

Uncle Henry dances in the "end zone" in celebration. Pissed, Young Max slams his racket to the court...and walks toward the service box to examine the line.

    YOUNG MAX
    YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS!

Uncle Henry continues to gloat...without mercy.

    YOUNG MAX
    You don't have to rub it in!

    UNCLE HENRY
    The real question, Max, is why you aren't celebrating.

    YOUNG MAX
    Because I lost.

Uncle Henry pours himself a refill from a day cooler on the court.

    UNCLE HENRY
    Max...a man should acknowledge his losses as gracefully as he celebrates his victories...
    (goading)
    Now give us a jig...for your old Uncle's sake...
Following orders, Young Max makes a half-hearted attempt to dance around the court.
UNCLE HENRY
Try harder, Max-a-million! Focus!
Arms up in triumph!
(not happy with his
performance)
Dance boy -- don't shimmy like an
Italian!

Young Max raises his arms, but he's just not feeling it...and
abruptly stops.

MAX
This is stupid.

Uncle Henry crosses the court and tussles the boy's hair.

UNCLE HENRY
Someday, Max, you'll come to see
that a man learns nothing from
winning. The act of losing,
however, can elicit great
wisdom...not the least of which is
how much more enjoyable it is to
win... It is essential to lose now
and then... The trick is not to
make a habit of it...

THE PRESENT.

38
EXT. VINEYARD - LATER

Max walking through the vineyard. Kneels down. Notices that
there are roses at the head of each row. Stoops down, scoops
up some dirt, and sniffs it. Makes a face. Ugh.

OFFSCREEN VOICE
Chickenshit...

Duflot appears from out of the vines...trailed by his blue
dog Tati.

DUFLOT
It is the only thing for them.

Before Max can react, Duflot kisses him three times on the
cheeks, then bearhugs him. Duflot's a real sweaty guy with a
persistent swarm of gnats whirling around him.

MAX
Monsieur Duflot? My God,
you've...uh...matured.
DUPLOT
C'est vrai. The floods of '78.
The Mistral of '86. Fanleaf
disease in '93.
(MORE)
DUFLOT (cont'd)
With each vintage I have corked away another year of my youth. But still, I have my wife Ludivine, and my dog Tati, who is loyal, affectionate, and...

MAX
...blue....

Max stares down at the blue terrier. BARK! BARK!

DUFLOT
(gestures; c'est la vie)
I expect you are hungry, no? My wife is tonight roasting a lamb--

MAX
Thank you, but no. I am tired, and don't have much of an appetite... since I learned about Henry.

DUFLOT
(tear in his eye)
In the last few years, his sight was failing. But I attended to things for him. We became very close, you know? Almost like father and son.

MAX
(cynical)
I'm happy that someone was here to take care of him.

DUFLOT
Bon! Ludivine will come in the morning...with croissants...she will resume her duties.

MAX
If you insist. Well... Bon nuit, Duflot.

DUFLOT
A demain.

Max heads back to the house. He feels like he's being watched, so he stops, turns, and sure enough, Duflot is watching him...only his head is showing.

Duflot gestures with a smile, then disappears like a ghost in the gloaming, as we...
INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Max finds a bottle of 'La Siroque' on the table, with a note from Ludivine that reads: "Bienvenu." Also a small plate of goat cheese. He pulls the cork, pours a glass. Takes a sniff.

MAX
Ah...La Siroque.

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S STUDY - MINUTES LATER

Max spies an old record player with a stack of 45's balancing in position on the silver spindle. Henry's final playlist! Max turns the player on, lines up the records...and lets the first record drop... Noel Coward's voice CRACKLES:

NOEL COWARD
"...a room with a view, and you, and no one to hurry us..."

MAX
(singing the rest)
"...no one to worry us..."

Max peruses photos of Henry. Inspects a wall overstuffed with books (Greene, Maughm, Waugh, Wodehouse). Then, raises the glass, affectionately, to a photograph of Uncle Henry grinning back at him.

MAX
Here's to you Henry. For devoting your life to the vines, and bottling the truth...

Take a sip. Runs the wine around his palate. Nods in recognition.

MAX
Well, that was honest...

He opens a window and spits it out.

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - LATER

Max stands in only his socks and boxers, scrubbing the tomato stain out of his dress shirt. Outside, there is a chorus of hearty ribbiting. He remembers and smiles to himself.
MAX
(affectionately)
Frogs.
Max keeps scrubbing, enjoying the moment more than even he knows...

INT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - STAIRWELL - MORNING

Sunlight streams through a window. Max appears at the top of the stairs, in his uncle’s weathered bathrobe, barefoot. He yawns, squints at the daylight.

INT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - KITCHEN

An opened refrigerator offers Max little. He scours in particular for one item, without luck:

MAX
Coffee, coffee, coffee... Shite.

Max, breakfast under his arm: a litre of milk and a hunk of cheese...shuffles towards the door as...

-- MADAME DUFLOT enters, stout in purple sweats and a bird’s nest of orange hair, carrying a vacuum cleaner and bucket.

MAX
Madame Duflot.

MADAME DUFLOT
Ah, Maxie, Maxie, Maxie!

She kisses him three times on the cheeks. Ruffles his hair. Takes him in. He has grown since she last saw him... Madame Duflot proceeds begins to playful scold Max -- for assuming she would not bring him breakfast, for wearing that bathrobe when there’s a perfectly good one she laid out for him, for drinking milk out of the bottle, etcetera, etcetera. She snaps the milk and cheese out of his hands and shoos him outside. Max doesn’t understand a word.

MADAME DUFLOT
(shooing him out)

Attendez dans le jardin! Je vous apporte le petit dejeuner! (Mr. Max, go to the garden! I will bring his breakfast!)

EXT. GARDEN - AT THE CHESS TABLE - MOMENTS LATER

Max sits in the garden, beneath the trellis, tapping away on his Treo. Suddenly, he's startled by -- SLAM! -- Madame Duflot drops a tray of breakfast on the table.
MADAME DUFLOT
  Bon appetit.


RING-VIBRATE! His Treo goes off.

MAX
  Morning, Gemma.

GEMMA (O.S.)
  Enjoying yourself?

MAX
  As bereavements go?

INT. LAWTON BROTHERS OFFICE - DAY

GEMMA
  This'll cheer you up. You've been busted. Morning FT. Headline. "LAWTON BOND TRADE UNDER INVESTIGATION."

  MAX (O.S.)
  What?

GEMMA
  (reading)
  "The FSA today launched an official inquiry into recent Lawton Brothers trade activity..."

  MAX (O.S.)
  Relax...I already cleared the deal through legal. They gave me the go ahead. This is just a PR show to assuage Lustig Bank.

GEMMA
  Pepper doesn't think so.

Max stops dead.

MAX (O.S.)
  (ripple of fear)
  Nigel?
GEMMA
Sir Nigel. He wants a sit down with you. 5 o'clock this afternoon.

MAX (O.S.)
(because that means this is serious)
What time's my meeting with the notaire?

GEMMA
A little over an hour from now.

MAX (O.S.)
My time or your time?

Gemma shakes her head. Oh shit, she forgot.

GEMMA
Oops.

OMITTED

EXT. BASTIDE - DRIVEWAY - LATER

Max pulls on his jacket and climbs into the Smart Car. Phone rings, it's Charlie.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
So how's La Maison? Is it smashing?

MAX
(eyeing it)
To be honest, Charlie, it's a little bit shabby.

EXT. LONDON TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Charlie has stepped outside from an open house to call Max.

CHARLIE
We don't say shabby, Max. We say “filled with the patina of a bygone era.” What about the plonk?
MAX (O.S.)
Bouquet of wet dog. Hits the palate like a razor blade, with the finishing hints of awful.
CHARLIE
One thing we're going to need for sure is an oenologue. Test the vines, take soil samples, things of that sort. Ask around, there must be a couple not far from you. Oh -- and few sexy snaps wouldn't hurt either...you know, to get the punters clamoring...

ON THE SAME ROAD - FAR AHEAD OF MAX

FANNY, 30s, the most beautiful woman in Provence, is cycling along -- leather jacket, skirt hitched up and blissfully unaware of the Englishman hurtling up the road.

INSIDE MAX'S SMART CAR

CHARLIE (O.S.)
There's an e-mail address to send them to...

Max holds his PALM ONE TREO in front of him, switches it the an e-mail screen...

MAX
Okay. Shoot.

CHARLIE
PROVENCELISTINGS@BROADBENTPROPERTIE
S.ENG

* *

On his lap, Max starts typing the address into his Treo. Fumbles it into the opposite footwell.

MAX
Hold on. Shite.

Through the windscreen, Fanny appears ahead... She spots Max's car speeding toward her. She swerves to avoid it...and flies off the road and into an irrigation ditch.

INSIDE SMART CAR

Max grabs the Treo and finishes entering the address, oblivious to everything.
EXT. VILLAGE STREET - DAY

Max parks his Smart Car in the square. The town is a little gem. However, Max doesn’t notice a thing...he heads straight to the Notaire’s office...

INT. NOTAIRE’S OFFICE - RECEPTION - MORNING

Max enters. Up front, a waiting area is filled with a thick cloud of cigarette smoke. The SECRETAIRE sits behind a desk, chain smoking. In back, a closed door leads to Maitre Auzet’s office.

RECEPTIONIST

Qui?

MAX

Auzet?

INT. NOTAIRE’S OFFICE - DAY

A pair of shapely tattooed ankles. PAN UP. NATHALIE AZUZET, 40s, attractively austere: grey suit, glasses, Louise Brooks bobcut. She sits behind her desk, downloading him...

NATHALIE

You see Monsieur, most wine-making regions in France exist through an arrangement known as metayage...

(noticing he’s fixating on her tattoos)

Mr. Skinner?

MAX

Hmmm?

(snaps out)

Sorry.

Max signs the paperwork in front of him.

NATHALIE

In the arrangement, the vigneron makes the wine, the estate owner maintains the property. C'est simple. The proceeds of the wine are then shared equally. This is how your uncle and Monsieur Duflot worked for over thirty years. Naturally Monsieur Duflot will be anxious as to your intentions.
MAX
(businesslike)
I can speed this all up. I have no plans to become a vintner.

NATHALIE
Bon, let Monsieur Duflot make the wine, and you enjoy the estate on the weekends.

MAX
I don't think you quite understand, Ms. Auzet. My life is in London. And I don't do weekends. I plan on selling La Siroque as soon as possible.

She looks up. Removes her glasses.

NATHALIE
Henri would approve of this?

Max smiles a little to himself.

MAX
Tell me, how well did you know my Uncle?

Auzet gives a tiny cough. Max smirks to himself. He thought so.

MAX
So then... as you know... the chateau was Uncle Henry's passion. But it's not mine. I'm sure he would understand.

NATHALIE
And what of Monsieur Duflot? He and his wife have been on the estate for thirty years. If not dealt with properly, you could be -- how do you say -- caught between a "rock and a stone?"

MAX
Charming... But I fail to see the complications... I can assure you, upon settlement, I will be very generous with Mr. Duflot... as always in a case such as this, it's just a matter of finding the right number...

(MORE)
MAX (cont'd)

(shifting)

Now on an entirely different note, I wonder if you might help me find an...oenologue?
Auzet
On this, I will have to get back to you.

Max
In that case, if there's nothing else, I've got a plane to catch...

Max grabs the paperwork, gets up and heads for the door.

Max
Thank you again, Ms. Auzet. Under normal circumstances I'd have asked you to lunch. Your tattoos alone beg a thousand questions.

Auzet
But for you Mr. Skinner, the answer will always be the same.

Int. Chateau La Siroque - Bedroom - Day

Max hurriedly packs his carry-on, pauses to consider taking the photograph of himself and Uncle Henry stomping grapes.

Omitted

Ext. Chateau La Siroque - Front - Day

Jacket on, Max exits, briefcase in hand. Duflot is waiting for him, blocking the path to his car.

Duflot
You are selling La Siroque? There has been a mistake, I think.

Max
News travels fast.

He moves toward his car...

Duflot
But your uncle. He meant for you to have it, not sell it.

Max
If he meant that, he might have taken the time to say so in a proper will. But he didn't.
DUFLOT
You know, Henri was not English the way you are! He was a man of secrets. A man of passions. He did not write things down.

For a moment, this resonates with Max. Max opens the door and chucks his attache onto the front seat.

DUFLOT
You would take me away from my vines?!

MAX
They're my vines, Duflot.

DUFLOT
I live in them! I breathe in them! They tear my hands!

MAX
Listen, Duflot...
(gentle touch)
Francis. When I've sold the property, I intend to make you a handsome settlement...

DUFLOT
Money?! You think it's money that I want?!

Max is truly baffled.

DUFLOT
Do you know what it is, monsieur, to love something more than your own life? To submit your days and nights to the fickle will of nature? I haven't but a handful of vintages left. Soon, my body and spirit will be defeated by the terroir. And you would dare come here and take away my last few chances of immortality?!

Max is now in the car. He pauses, reflecting. Closes the door.

MAX
Afraid so.

He starts the car.
MAX
I’ll be in touch.
(calls out after him)
This is not over! No! Ou on a la terre, on a la guerre! (Where there is land, there is war.)

He stomps away into the fields as Max starts the car. His PHONE RING-VIBRATES as he pulls out. He answers:

MAX
Leaving now.

GEMMA (O.S.)
Good. Sir Nigel is making a special trip. Everything all right?

MAX
No, it was just... Nothing.

GEMMA (O.S.)
Did you get the photos for Charlie?

MAX
Damnit!

Max hangs up, slams on the brakes.

EXT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - GARDEN - DAY

The heavy frame of the front door. CLICK. A panorama of the vineyard. CLICK. The tennis court. CLICK.

Max levels his Treo (which serves as a digital camera too) for a shot of the house from the garden, but he's too close. He circles the perimeter of the pool to line it up again when his phone RINGS AGAIN.

MAX
What?!

GEMMA (O.S.)
Get in the car!

MAX
(re: his camera-phone)
Get off my camera, Gemma!

He hangs up and steps up on the diving board to line up a shot. He walks out farther on the board to get a better angle, then -- CLICK! CRACK! THE DIVING BOARD SNAPS. HIS PHONE GOES FLYING.
Max plummets from sight. WE PUSH DOWN TO DISCOVER --
IN THE POOL - Max rolls over on mud and leaves, wincing, gets
to his feet. Realizing he's okay, he laughs at himself and
shakes off the pain. As he looks around, his face drops. No
shallow end. Smooth steep walls.

Max leaps for the lip of the pool. Misses by inches. Tries

Propping the broken diving board against the wall he
precariously edges up it, as he reaches for the top -- SLAP!
His makeshift ramp skids from under him, sending him flying.

Defeated, festooned in mud, his cell phone is RING-VIBRATING:
moving it closer to the edge of the pool.

MAX
Oh, please -- come to papa.

INT. LAWTON BROTHERS OFFICE - DAY

Through glass walls of the boardroom, Gemma watches Sir Nigel
Pepper, a 50-something silverback barrow boy in Armani.
Arriving. She catches his eye. Smiles. He flexes his jaw.
Gemma dials fast.

GEMMA
(into phone)
Where are you, you tosser?

EXT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - IN THE POOL

Max POV: The phone rings vibrating/moving. Out of sight.

MAX
Aaargh! Call back! C'mon Gemma!

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Fanny chugs along in her 2CV, mangled bike on the top.
Passing Chateau La Siroque, she clocks a lime-green Smart Car
in the drive. Skids to a halt.

EXT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - A BIT LATER

Distant expletives coming from the back...
EXT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - GARDEN

Fanny circles the house, tracing Max's voice. To the pool.
WHERE SHE FINDS

a mud-caked Neanderthal, busily constructing a ramp out of mud and a broken diving board. He retreats, muttering, then with all his might sprints at the construction, bellowing, plants one foot upon it, pulverizing it. He barks his shoulder on the wall and lands, submerged in the gunk. He spots he is not alone.

MAX
Hello.

FANNY
Qu’est-ce que vous faites?

MAX
It’s okay. I’m the pool man, I always do this on Thursdays... Just routine maintenance.

FANNY
Ah. You are a ‘ros beef?

MAX
Oui. Anglais, stupide.

A soft breeze flutters her dress, and Max covertly moves to get a peek of her shapely legs...

MAX
This is all rather wonderful chatting like this...and you are a vision, but...any chance of a rope of a ladder?

FANNY
Is that your car out front?

MAX
Yes, sorry -- I am temporarily the custodian of the lime-green rollerskate. It’s a hired car. Not for sale. Sorry. Look, I’m in a hole. Literally. And I want to get out.

FANNY
Can you swim?

MAX
Not in a foot of shit.
FANNY

Bon.

She disappears from his view.
MAX
(To himself)
Hello? 'Allo?

After a few moments wondering, Max hears a gurgling rumble. Inquisitive, he stares at the spout. Bugs begin to leap out frantically. Just in time he moves -- a TORRENTIAL FLOOD OF WATER bursts from a spout along the inside of the pool. Max dodges as he realizes: Fanny has turned on the valve pump. Misses the second exploding spout. The third hits him the shoulder, which turns his face in the fourth. The force sends him horizontal into the mud.

MAX
Holy crap!

MAX IS GIVEN A FOUR-WAY YELLOW CHLORINE ENEMA. HE FIGHTS TO STAY ALIVE.

2A  EXT. LONDON AIRPORT

Max’s DRIVER stands as the last “arrival” passengers dribble out... He dials his cell phone.

CUT TO:

3  INT. LAWTON BROTHERS OFFICE

GEMMA
(in command)
Right. Right. Roger that.


DISOLVE TO:

3  EXT. POOL - LATER

Water up to Max’s elbows. He carefully takes off his watch while holding his shoes out of the water. After putting his watch inside, Max throws his shoes up above, saving them almost certain ruin. Up above, his cellphone ring-vibrates again: caught on a slight rise in the pool’s lip.

MAX
Yes, Gemma, I know, I know.

CUT TO:
LATER, and the sun is dipping in the sky. Max is on his back now, floating on the water. His mood has shifted. He stares into the pinwheel of colors in the sky.
MAX

'Why do you like the desert, Colonel Lawrence?'
(in flawless O'Toole)
'I like it because it's clean.'

CUT TO:

DESERTED POOL. No Max. Has he drowned? Suddenly, from the depths, Max launches: reaching full stretch...he misses the lip by a centimeter. Dives down, launches again: got it! His fingers strain and he hauls, ravaged and soaking but free.

INT. LONDON TAXI - DUSK

Ring... Gemma picks up the phone.

GEMMA
You better be in prison.

MAX (O.S.)
Tell him I'm sorry, I can explain.

GEMMA
Sorry's no good. He's gone. Off on one of his retreats for a week.

INT./EXT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - BACK TERRACE DOOR - NIGHT

Max, dripping, stripping off his wet things.

MAX
Shit. When's the first flight out tomorrow...?

GEMMA (O.S.)
Max, there's no rush anymore. The last thing Sir Nigel did on his way out was suspend you 'til he gets back.

MAX
What?!

GEMMA (O.S.)
Max. He was really angry. You've made him a lot of enemies, Max. Why didn't you pick up the phone?

Max's face goes white.
MAX
What does he expect me to do for a week?

GEMMA (O.S.)
Take a holiday.

MAX
Christ he didn’t say that did he?

GEMMA (O.S.)
No, I just did.

MAX
If anyone calls, do not tell them I’m on holiday! That’s worse than dying. Suspended or not, I’m not gonna stop trading!

PULL BACK TO REVEAL...

Max, in his underpants, standing in a puddle, surveying his vineyard. Armani in a sodden heap.

INT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Max takes a couple of sleeping pills. He opens the window. On the sill, he notices a heap of moldy lavender sitting in a cheap plastic dish. It looks disgusting. He makes a face and tosses it into the trash. Gets into bed.

THREE HOURS LATER

Max is sitting up in bed. Very much not sleeping. The frogs outside are in fine voice. Ribbit-ribbit, ribbit-ribbit...

MAX
Frogs...

EXT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - EARLY MORNING

The vineyard at daybreak.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Madame Duflot is dutifully washing Max’s suit by hand, suds and all. Pulls it out. Rings it out.
INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - LATER

Max's eyes slowly flutter open. He gets up and walks to the shutters, but when he throws them open, a FRENZIED SWARM of scorpions EXPLODES from the sill!

MAX
Holy shit!

70A

INT. STAIRWELL - SAME

Madame Duflot is climbing the steps with Max's pressed suit when she hears his screams. She rushes up...

70B

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - SAME

Max grabs a shoe and frantically pounds anything that moves. Madame Duflot bursts in and sees the scorpions. She uses the suit to help him kill the bugs.

MADAME DUFLOT
Lavande!? Lavande!?

Madame Duflot joins in, and thrashes the scorpions with Max's newly-cleaned suit. Then, she fishes the plastic dish of moldy lavender out of the trash...and pompously waves in front of Max's face.

MADAME DUFLOT
Lavande!

She firmly places it back on the window sill.

70C

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - LATER

Max digs through Uncle Henry's clothes closet. It's filled an assortment of styles, spanning the decades.

71

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Max enters. He's wearing an unoffending pair of his Uncle's trousers (loose waist, cuffs under his heels, school tie as a belt). Rummages through the fridge. Grabs a day-old croissant. Cup of coffee.

CHARLIE'S VOICE (O.S.)
Back in blighty mon ami?...
INT. HALLWAY - MORNING

Max, on the phone, eats. Intercut with Charlie (in London) as Max wanders around the house.

MAX

On the contrary, Charlie, I’ve decided to stay for a couple of days. You know, smell the lavender and relax.

INT. BASEMENT FLAT IN FULHAM - SAME

Charlie stands in his kitchen in a paisley dressing gown, scooping Nescafe from a jumbo-sized tin. The Financial Times sits on his counter.

CHARLIE

"Relax?!" So it is true. You are getting sacked!

MAX

I’m not getting sacked, Charlie. I’m...exploring options with a view to realizing the full potential of my inheritance.

CHARLIE’S VOICE

In that case, how long before your inheritance is ready to view?

INT. TOP CORRIDOR - MORNING

Max sees two chickens strutting about. Sees a patch in the ceiling that needs a major repair.

MAX

It’s cosmetic stuff mostly. Just needs a scrub and a coat of paint. So shall we say, first viewing’s in two or three days...?

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME

Max stops. Three days? Shit. He pulls at the flimsy curtains. It showered him with dust, dead wasps, etc.

CHARLIE

You sure?
MAX
No problem at all, Charlie.

Max wanders down the hall and opens the cellar door...

INT. CELLAR STAIRCASE - SAME

MAX
Oh. One last thing. The wine they make here... It is not, repeat *not* first class.

CHARLIE'S VOICE
How bad can it be?

Max rummaging through bottles on dusty shelves.

MAX
Just gives you a blinding headache and makes you angry. Best make sure the buyers don’t know shite about wine.

CHARLIE'S VOICE
Not a problem, old chap. Just make sure she’s match fit in 72 hours.

Max examines with interest bottles labelled with grease pencil: *Le Coin Perdu*.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

In a messy garage, Max digs among the junk. A few old paintpots. Murky turps. Finally he locates a paintbrush, sitting in a tin of paint. Max jerks the brush out, seeing it’s stuck in a chunk of congealed paint. He grabs the turpentine and drops the paintbrush in it...then, spies a tire sticking out from beneath a sheet...

Max crosses the garage and whips off the sheet, revealing a fire truck red Heritage Springer.

MAX
You dirty old bugger.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - LATER

Max inspects the bike. Checks for oil and gas, drive shaft. Tries to turn it over, it won’t start. Battery’s gone flat. He heads to the garage for an extension cord...to recharge.
INT. GARAGE - SECONDS LATER

Max passes the turpentine...and discovers his paintbrush is gone.

MAX
What the hell..?

EXT. OUTSIDE LE CAVE - DAY

Duflot sits in the sunshine, leisurely sharing his lunch with Tati. On his head, a traditional black beret. Max approaches, game-face on. There, on the ground beneath his feet. The paintbrush.

MAX
The paintbrush. I was about to use it. You took it. Why?

DUFLOT
C'est moi. It is my paintbrush.

Silence.

MAX
That's the only paintbrush in the house.

DUFLOT
There is a hardware store in Apt. They sell paintbrushes. (sips his coffee.) But, voila, it is closed today.

Max refuses to be beaten. Gets his wallet out.

MAX
Ok. This is fun. I'll give you...20 Euros for it.

Duflot doesn't react.

MAX
No? Fifty. (No reaction) Fine. I'll give you a hundred euros for the brush.

Impasse. Duflot munches his breakfast.
MAX
(leveling)
What do you want, Duflot?

Duflot stands.
DUFLOT
When you sell I stay vigneron. I keep my vines. *Une contracte.*

Max doesn't blink. He regards his opponent.

MAX
You want to stay with your vines? Fine. You help me fix up the place. Do the gardens, paint the house, help me with the pool. 72 hours of hard labor. You help me construct this lie, and I -- if at all possible -- will attempt to convince the new owner of the worth and value of your services and your immortal harvests.

Stares at Max. Studies him. Duflot spits into his palm, and extends it to shake.

DUFLOT
A Frenchman's hand is his word.

Max spits a bigger hock into his own palm.

MAX
An Englishman's word is his bond.

They shake, spit merging.

DUFLOT
Concorde.

MAX
Deal.

Max walks off...wiping the spit on his pant leg...

MAX
Frog Tosspot.

DUFLOT
*English prick.*

BEGIN REPAIR MONTAGE

EXT. BASTIDE - BACK GARDEN - NEXT MORNING

Cigarette dangling from his mouth, Duflot is pruning an overgrown hedge with a vine sickle.
A broken chair comes flying out of a top window, crashing to the ground, just missing him. Max sticks his head out, holding back a smile.
EXT. POOL - NEXT MORNING

Duflot, up to his shins in slime, scoops up leaves and mud, and dumps them into a bucket. Madame Duflot pulls the bucket by rope, and unloads the crap into a wheelbarrow. PAPA DUFLOT, 80's, watches this procedure, somnambulant.

INT. HENRY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Max shoves the heavy bed across the floor to cover a huge moldy patch. Behind it he finds a single stiletto shoe. He smiles. Places it on the mantel as if it was a museum piece.

INT. SERVANTS QUARTERS - LATER

The walls are exposed with old, rickety wood. Ants are crawling everywhere. Max sprays with insecticide.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Max is throwing a load of broken tennis rackets into black sacks. He pulls the basket they were in away from the wall. He stops. On the wall behind them is painted cricket stumps.

MAX
(softly)
Oh wow.

FLASHBACK - RAINY DAY

Young Max comes running down the corridor to bowl, releasing the ball and clearing a wall shelf of about five vases, halfway down the corridor. They SMASH to the ground.

Henry, smoking, is padded up in full cricket whites at the other end in front of the stumps.

UNCLE HENRY
(loud; calmly)
Wide...

THE PRESENT. Max does a perfect "D.K. lillee off-cutter." Hits the center stump.

MAX
Howz that!
INT. TOP OF STAIRCASE - DAY

Max, balancing precariously on a step ladder, is busy rolling whitewash over crumbling, damp plaster. Duflot passes below him.

    DUFLOT
    It will not last a month.

    MAX
    That's someone else's problem.

He slaps on another coat.

    MADAME DUFLOT (O.S.)
    Monsieur Max!

MAX'S POV - DOWN THE AIRSHAFT

Madame Duflot stares up, looking uneasy.

    MADAME DUFLOT
    There is...a person.

    MAX
    A person?

    MADAME DUFLOT
    (motioning)
    At the door.

INT. CHATEAU LE SIROQUE - ENTRYWAY

Max opens the front door. Standing there: a pretty BLONDE GIRL, 21, with a backpack. She's wearing shorts, flip-flops, and a San Francisco Giants baseball hat.

    BLONDE GIRL
    (perfect French)
    Bonjour. Je recherche le propriétaire du domaine. (Good morning. I am looking for the owner of the estate.)

She smiles, flashing her blindingly white teeth.

    MAX
    The only country that issues teeth like that is America.
BLONDE GIRL
Oh, you speak English?

MAX
Like a native.
BLONDE GIRL
My name's Christie Roberts... I'm looking for Mr. Skinner.

MAX
And you have found him.

CHRISTIE
(chuckles)
Impossible, you're way too young.

MAX
(sexual innuendo)
Funny, I was just thinking the same about you.

CHRISTIE
I meant too young to be my Dad.
Henry Skinner's my father.

Clearly off of Max's doubt and mistrust, Christie fishes into her knapsack, unearth's a photo, and hands it to Max--

INSERT - PHOTO ON GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE

A late 50's Uncle Henry poses with Christie's Mother, 20's, gorgeous, who wears a sexy, Jennifer Beals, hang-off-the-shoulder sweatshirt.

MADAME DUFLOT (O.S.)
She has Henri's nose!

Max turns -- Madame Duflot is looking over his shoulder at the photo. Max steps out onto the landing, closes the door behind him, shutting off Madame Duflot.

MAX
That's your Mum?

CHRISTIE
(proudly)
In all her Flashdance-glory...
(excited)
So is he around?

Max stops... only now does he realize she doesn't know.

MAX
You don't know?

CHRISTIE
Know what?
MAX
Oh. Right.
(pinches his nose)
Uh. Look.

He sighs, looks at her for some time.

MAX
Sorry I've forgotten your name.

CHRISTIE
It's Christie.

MAX
Christie. Look Christie...

CHRISTIE
Oh my God. He's dead, isn't he?

Max stops. Slightly impressed at her intuition.

MAX
A month ago.

Christie is crestfallen. Eyes welling up.

MAX
Cup of tea?

EXT. BASTIDE - MINUTES LATER

Christie sits at the chess table, recovering. PAN WITH MAX as he emerges from the house with two cups of tea and a few sandwiches.

MAX
So... California?

CHRISTIE
(sadly)
Mom was a tour guide in Napa Valley. That's where she met Henry. He took the tour one day and charmed her pants off. Literally.

(MORE)
CHRISTIE (cont'd)

By the time she realized she was pregnant, Henry was long gone...so she never told him...then waited until last week -- my 21st birthday -- to come clean with me.

(sighs)
Totally unbelievable...to come this far only to find out he's...gone.

As Christie's eyes well up again--

MAX

I think I'll get something stronger.

EXT. MAX'S POV FROM ABOVE - MINUTES LATER

Christie sits alone, sipping a Campari, eating a sandwich.

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S STUDY - TERRCARE - SAME

Max spies on her from above, on his cellphone, quietly conspiring with Charlie in London.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

This is more than a wrinkle, Max. What if the girl turns out to be legit?

MAX

She bowls up a couple of weeks after he carks it? It's too sweet Charlie. I'm not buying it.

CHARLIE

You need some legal advice, mate. And you need it fast, before the little nymph cuts loose and makes a mess of Chateau Skinner.

EXT. BASTIDE - CHESS TABLE - MINUTES LATER

Max rejoins Christie, who's admiring the estate...

MAX

(looks at watch)

Listen, Christie, I've just got to pop into town.

She stuffs the rest of the sandwich in her mouth.
CHRISTIE
(gamely; standing)
No prob. I booked a youth hostel in town...just in case the old man was schitzo.
(MORE)
CHRISTIE (cont’d)
You mind dropping me? I’ve really gotta get out of these clothes.

MAX
Why not get out of your clothes here? We’ve got tons of space... Rooms to spare. Clean up. Have yourself a shower. I’ll be back in no time...
(loud)
Madame Dulfol! A guest!

CHRISTIE
Wow, you sure?

MAX
Of course.

Max flashes a deliciously fake grin, as Madame Duflot charges out to take care of Christie.

INT. MAITRE AUZET’S OFFICE - A BIT LATER
Max paces the office, apoplectic. Auzet sits behind her desk, studying the photo of Henry and Christie’s Mom.

MAX
But she never even met my Uncle!

AUZET
Under French Law, there is no difference between legitimate and illegitimate children when it comes to their right to inherit. In theory, the girl would be entitled to sole ownership of the estate.

MAX
Ridiculous! She could be an imposter.

AUZET
That is precisely why she would be required to produce some form of documentation -- a photo or even correspondence. If this is deemed sufficient evidence, a DNA test would then be ordered to establish paternity.

MAX
Dig the old boy up?! Bollocks you will!
Auzet
Mr. Skinner, your Uncle Henri was cremated.

Max
(off the hook; relieved)
That's right... Great.

Auzet
However... viable samples can be obtained from an old hairbrush, or even a licked stamp.

Max
(scheming)
Suppose I was to sell the place... before she filed a claim?

Auzet
Legally, she could invalidate a sale, even after the transfer of title.
(Max, at wits end)
But this is all assuming the girl wishes to make a claim. Perhaps her intentions are harmless? My advice is to treat her with the utmost respect and hope she'll be on her way... French courts have a way of favoring the lesser dog; don't make her one.

Max
Courts?

Ext. Main Street - Day

Max walks back to the Smart Car, he pulls out into the main street. The streets bustle with foot and bike traffic. Max stops and starts. Gets stuck on a narrow street.

Through the half obscured windscreen he spots Fanny as she walks practically over him carrying a tray. She serves a table, then crosses back behind him to serve some tables across the street.

Max
Hell-bitch...!

Moving with Fanny
As she breezes back inside the restaurant car horns honk behind Max and he has to move on.

MOVING WITH MAX
As he parks his midget car in the world's smallest space. He jogs back to her restaurant. No sign of her. Then...she emerges, carrying a tray and water jug. Max puffs up his chest and marches toward her.

MAX
Joan of Arc.

She turns. An iridescent Provencal beauty. He's bowled over.

FANNY
Ah Jacques Cousteau.
She walks straight past him, almost pushing him out the way.

MAX
You tried to drown me.

FANNY
And you tried to run me over with your little car!

MAX
What are you talking about...? What do you mean I tried to run you over?

FANNY
Down the road from La Siroque! You were driving your midget car on your phone -- and, I believe, had your head stuck very far up your ass! Look at the damage you have caused me...!

She pivots and YANKS UP HER SKIRT on one side, revealing: an ENORMOUS BLACK-AND-BLUE BRUISE adorning the most gorgeous cheek since Eve. Max is a deer caught in headlights, along with the rest of the male patrons of the cafe.

FANNY
(skirt down, at him again)
Faites attention fou! You try to kill me, I try to kill you. Eh bien, c'est fini.

She turns on her heel and marches back inside, unaware that her skirt is stuck in her underwear. Max watches her, transfixed. A small car crashes gently into a car in front.

MAX
My God. She's fantastic.

79

EXT. GARDEN - LATER

Max stares at the pool which is crystal clear now, half-filled, water shimmering. Papa Duflot calmly skims the pool. Beyond him, Max sees Duflot, wearing a white visor, on higher ground, pulling a roller on the tennis court. Things are looking good.

CHRISTIE (O.S.)

Hey Max!

Max looks up.
MAX’S POV - THIRD FLOOR

Christie hangs out the window. Hair wet, barely clothed, she must have just gotten out of the shower.

CHRISTIE
(earnest)
Max, I can’t thank you enough for inviting me to stay... Look at the view, it’s like Cezanne country!

MAX
(dryly)
It is Cezanne country.

Christie notices a dish of moldy lavender on the sill. Gross. She tosses it out the window.

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. TENNIS COURT - MINUTES LATER

The court’s looking good. Duflot huffs and puffs with the roller. Max reflexively picks up an old brush and whisks the dust off the ancient plastic lines.

MAX
(cool)
Duflot...? This afternoon...in town...there was a--

DUFLOT
Her name is Fanny Chenal.

Max is stunned. How does Duflot even know what he’s talking about? Max continues to brush. Duflot continues to roll on the other side...at a distance...

DUFLOT
Many times I have seen this same look on your Uncle’s face.

Max is impressed by Duflot’s insight.

DUFLOT
But you deserve special credit.
Oh? Why?
DUFLOT
You are now the town hero for
making her show her derriere.

MAX
Bloody hell, news travels fast.

Dulfot carries on rolling.
Now Max is rifling through an old box that has croquet mallets and tennis rackets in it. Max comes forward with two ancient racquets, and balls. He stops in his tracks, as a memory has come flooding back to him.

MAX
She grew up here, didn’t she?

DUFLOT
Who?

MAX
Fanny.

DUFLOT
I believe so, yes.

MAX
Is she...er...otherwise spoken for?

Duflot is now winding up the net. Max places the racket against the net measuring the height, motioning when to stop.

DUFLOT
She was. Once! A football player for Lyon. He was shit...just like his left foot. And treated her badly. Since then, it is rumored that she will let no man near her heart.

They are now facing each other across the net...

DUFLOT
Max, recall what Proust said: ‘Leave pretty women to men without imagination.’

MAX
I’m a banker, Duflot. I have no imagination.

Max lobs a racket to Duflot, which Duflot catches. Max points to his shirt. Fred Perry insignia.

MAX
Fred Perry.

Duflot smiles like a crocodile and tips his white visor.

DUFLOT
Henri Lacoste.
Max and Duflot face off at opposite ends of the court. The game begins. We witness a strenuous, comical, violent, dangerous, xenophobic game of tennis, culminating in Max's match point.
MAX
Match point, mate.

Duflot silent, awaiting the serve. THWACK! Max delivers an ace, leaving Duflot standing. They stare in silence. Max and Duflot appraise each other -- do we detect a moment of camaraderie? The moment is broken by Papa's slow hand-clap.

DUFLOT

Bon.

Duflot walks off, with a sharp command--

DUFLOT

PAPA! TATI!

All follow, leaving Max, sweaty, bloody, and enjoying the moment.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Max showers off.

MADAME DUFLOT

MONSIEUR MAX!
(Max is startled by a dinner gong)

Diner!

OMITTED

INT. DINING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Max enters and finds a table set for two, shimmering beneath candlelight. A Billie Holiday record plays.

MAX
Madame Duflot, she's my cousin.
(backpedaling)
Maybe.

MADAME DUFLOT

Ach! Half the aristocrats in France have liaisons with their cousins!

Madame Duflot leaves for the day. A gnarly meal awaits Max: congealed foie gras, cold escargot, and worst of all -- an opened bottle of *La Siroque* wine.
INT. WINE CAVE - EVENING

Max scans the rack of wine...so many choices. Nothing seems to strike his fancy...until he hones in on one of the unlabeled bottles of Le Coin Perdu. He snaps it up...
UNCLE HENRY’S VOICE
Psst... Max-a-million. Up here.

MAX’S POV - ABOVE HIM

A ladder leads up to some scaffolding, which runs along the
tops of the three cement vats that ferment the wine.

WE ARE NOW IN A FLASBACK. MAX CLIMBS UP THE LADDER, 91A
FOLLOWING RIGHT BEHIND HIS YOUNGER SELF... HE WATCHES YOUNG
MAX TAKE HIS PLACE NEXT TO UNCLE HENRY, WHO STANDS, ARMS
AKIMBO, STARING DOWN INTO THE MACERATING VAT OF WINE...
UNCLE HENRY WEARS A STRAW HAT, WITH A RING OF BURNING CANDLES
ATTACHED TO IT. THE FICKERING, FIERY GLOW OSCILLATES
THROUGHOUT THE CAVE...

UNCLE HENRY
tell me Max, what do you see down
there?

YOUNG MAX’S POV - INTO VAT

Filled to the rim with bubbling, fermenting red wine.

YOUNG MAX

Perverse.

UNCLE HENRY

(confused)

Are you speaking in tongues, boy?

YOUNG MAX

(confident)

Perverse. It’s a Latin term. It
means “to boil.” The native yeasts
in your cellar are converting the
sugar inside the grapes to alcohol.
The release of carbon dioxide gas
is what causes the bubbling effect.

UNCLE HENRY

I must be suffering from dementia,
I don’t recall ever having taught
you that.

YOUNG MAX

You didn’t. That Duflot guy
explained it to me.
UNCLE HENRY
Well done. Proves the adage that wisdom can be found in the most unlikely places.
(MORE)
UNCLE HENRY (cont'd)
To watch Duflot on bended knee,
doing something as simple as
weeding his soil... there's a
magnificent poetry in his devotion
to each and every grape. Perhaps
he'll inspire you to find devotion
in what you do for a living
someday?

YOUNG MAX
I want be a professional poker
player when I grow up. Or a
comedian.

UNCLE HENRY
Max, ask me what the most important
part of comedy is.

YOUNG MAX
What's the most important part--

UNCLE HENRY
(edging in)
--Timing.

PRESENT. Max chuckles, as the reverie fades away.

INT. BASTIDE - KITCHEN - MINUTES LATER

Max enters. Christie is sitting at the dining room table,
already stuffing her face with food. She's changed into
comfy clothes -- boxer shorts, tank top, slippers.

CHRISTIE
(re: estate wine)
Have you tasted Dad's wine?

MAX
It's bloody awful.

CHRISTIE
So you know?

MAX
To be fair, I'm a cognac drinker by
trade.

He pops the cork of the Le Coin. Pours himself and Christie
a taster. Max takes a sip.

MAX
Not bad.
Christie swirls, sniffs, sips, trills, and swallows.
CHRISTIE
Mmm. Formidable...
(tastes again)
It’s extraordinary. Like a
Bordeaux... only velvet rather than
wool...

MAX
Look who knows a thing or two about
wine...
CHRISTIE
In Napa, we're known to gargle and spit on occasion...

She studies the bottle... as she checks out the food, close up. Ugh!

CHRISTIE
Is this made here... on the estate?

MAX
If it's good, it can't be.

She grabs the Le Coin Perdu bottle and holds it up next to the La Siroque bottle. They are shaped differently.

CHRISTIE
Different bottles... (holds up the corks)
Same corks... (tastes Le Coin)
Completely different taste...
A little mystery, isn't it?

MAX
Yes, well, Henry was a bit of a mystery himself.

CHRISTIE
How so?

MAX
He loved England but lived in France. He loved women but never married. He loved adventure and yet all my memories of him are within a hundred steps of this very spot.

CHRISTIE
Are they good memories?

MAX
No... They're grand... (nostalgic)
Henry used to say: "Max, there's nowhere else in the world where you can keep busy doing so little and enjoy it so much."

Max looks at his watch.
MAX
Listen Christie, I’ve just got to
pop back into town.
CHRISTIE
Second time in one day. Sounds to me like you've found yourself a girl.

Max smiles. She’s a sharp one. Christie scoops up a plate of food and absconds the bottle of Le Coin Perdu.

CHRISTIE
(re: the bottle)
For research... Bonsoir, cuz.

MAX
Bonsoir, Christie.
Christie heads upstairs. Max can’t help himself; his eyes follow her ass.

93

INT. CAR - MOVING - MINUTES LATER

On the phone with Charlie.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
Hello?

MAX’S VOICE
Quick question, mate: is it illegal to shag your own cousin?

CHARLIE
Only if she’s ugly.

94

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

Darkened doorway. Is Max smoking a cigarette? MOVE CLOSER. No, it’s a lollipop. He’s lurking.

MAX’S POV - ACROSS THE STREET

The cafe. Max spies an overflow of people waiting outside. He tosses the lolly to the ground.

95

EXT. RENAISSANCE CAFE - SAME

The place is packed and frantically busy. Fanny buzzes around the restaurant, placating diners who haven’t received their entrees yet, then assuaging patrons who haven’t been seated yet… She has to brush past Max.
MAX
Your food must be terrific because
the service is shite.

She looks back.

FANNY
Please, monsieur, I am too busy to
ignore you.

MAX
(as she passes)
Where are all your waiters?

FANNY
Look, I have my hands full without
fun and games with you, comprehends?
McDonald's is in Avignon. Cod and
Chips in Marseille.

She rushes back to a complaining diner, and Max can see:
she's helplessly swamped.

IN THE KITCHEN

Fanny tries to keep up with her orders but her Cook's Helper
accidently drops a plate... CRASH! Merde! Fanny takes what's
ready out to see --

THE DINING ROOM

-- Max, with his jacket off and shirtsleeves rolled up,
taking orders from patrons. Of course, he doesn't understand
a word anyone's saying, but he doesn't let that deter him.
Fanny approaches:

MAX
Relax. I've done this before.

FANNY
Where?

He stops.

MAX
I worked my way through University
in London's finest restaurants.

A desperate chef rings a service bell and balances two
beautifully presented confections on top of a bouef en
croute. She has no choice. She grabs both plates and
thrusts them into Max's hands.
WANNY
Okay, you can serve. But if there
are any complaints, remember: in
France, the customer is always
wrong... Table six.

And off they go, in different directions, commencing:

A MONTAGE of Max's waiting tables. Turns out he wasn't
lying. He's absolutely brilliant. His impression of a
French waiter proves to be infallible, except for the slight
shortcoming of his inability to speak the language.

MAX
(as one diner points to
possible entrees)
...non...non...non...oui, c'est
magnifique...
(to another)
...avec?...c'est tout?...

AMERICAN MAN
(clicks fingers)
Garcon! We're ready to order!

Max arrives to greet an AMERICAN COUPLE.

AMERICAN MAN
My wife'll have the Nicoise salad,
only she wants it with loc-al Ranch
dressing, and toss in some bacon
bits and croutons. I'll have the
lamb chops. Well done. No butter.
Side of freedom fries--

Max snaps the menus from their hands.

MAX
McDonald's is in Avignon. Cod and
Chips in Marseille.

Fanny watches from afar, amused.

INT. RENAISSANCE CAFE - LATER

The last customer has left, the restaurant relaid for
tomorrow. Fanny divides the gratuity between her staff -- a
pile for the cook's helper, a pile for the busboy. Max is
sitting outside, watching her. Employees file out, passing
Max, complimenting his work. Thumbs up. Accolades.

Fanny comes out.
FANNY
Here are your tips... Thank you for your help. You're fired.

She moves off to stack chairs...

MAX
My vigneron says that you grew up here, in Gordes?

FANNY
Monsieur Duflot is mistaken. I only visited Gordes during the summers, with my mother.

MAX
You know, I spent all my summers here too. And I feel we may have met at some point?

FANNY
If we did, I hope I was unbearable.

MAX
Look, I know it's late but I was thinking, maybe there was someplace I could spend my hard-earned tips on a drink or two, to say sorry.
(she looks at him, sternly)

What?

FANNY
Are you asking me on a date?

MAX
No. No. Just a drink. I mean I'd like to prove I'm not just a maniac who goes around running people over.

FANNY
I'm not interested.

MAX
(laughing)

Why not?

FANNY
Because I don't like you.
She goes back in. Max is impressed. Produces a half-bottle of leftover red wine from beneath the table, and decides to sit things out.
EXT. RENAISSANCE CAFE - HOURS LATER - DARK

Max is patient. He waits outside for Fanny to finally close up. She emerges, surprised to see him, but also unable to suppress a smile. She heads to her car, which is parked on the street...

MAX
(calling out)
Exactly what is it about me that you don’t like?

FANNY
The fact that you asked.

She gets in. Starts the car, then, lowers her window...

FANNY
Saturday night. 8:00 at the Grand Chateau. Don’t be late.

Max smiles...and watches her pull out.
EXT. BASTIDE - NEXT MORNING

The estate looks like a Cezanne canvas: another gorgeous morning. Madame Duflot sweeps the courtyard. Suddenly, we HEAR Christie SCREAMING from her room:

CHRISTIE (O.S)
Omigod! Help! Scorpions!

Max charges into the room.

MAX
Lavande! Lavdande!

Using his shoe, he stamps out the scorpions. He fishes out the lavender dish from her garbage and slams it on the window sill.

MAX
Lavande!

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S STUDY - LATER

Max sits at his Uncle's desk, carefully examining the estate's accounting records, which are exceptionally neat, and all written in deep, green ink. Behind him, the record player spins a Harry Nilsson 45. Madame Duflot is on her knees, scouring the floor.

Max throws some papers off the desk into a bin. He stops. He picks up a RED WATERMAN FOUNTAIN PEN and rolls it in his palm. He unscrews the pot of green ink and smells it. He smiles. Remembering.

FLASHBACK. Uncle Henry on the couch, glass of wine on his stomach. At the desk is Young Max, gripping the SAME PEN, writing in Henry's checkbook, forging his handwriting.

YOUNG MAX
Pay to the order of...Francois Rupert, plumber.

UNCLE HENRY
How much?

YOUNG MAX
87 francs.

UNCLE HENRY
(sighs)
Sign!
Using Uncle Henry's real signature as a guide, Young Max flips it upside down, and copies the scrawl...
YOUNG MAX
H-e-n-r-y...S-k-i-n-n-e-r.

UNCLE HENRY
Who else, who else...?

YOUNG MAX
(rummaging through bills)
The mechanic?

UNCLE HENRY
(standing to pour wine)
Not a sou to that grease monkey!
The jag's still coughing up like your Aunt Midge.

Uncle Henry leans over admiring the young forger's handiwork.

UNCLE HENRY
You're a genius Maximillian. You could be me.

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S STUDY - PRESENT

Max puts the pen back, wistfully.

MAX
(whispers)
You could be me.

The next record drops. Needle hits the grooves. Edmundo Ross. A rumba. Madame Duflot starts to subtly swing to the music. From behind, it looks like the song is evoking an intense, emotional memory.

MAX
(catching her eye)
Do you ever miss my Uncle, Madame Duflot?

MADAME DUFLOT
He was an excellent dancer.

Max smiles. He thought so.

MADAME DUFLOT
Mr. Max? You will come to our home...manger...ce soir.

MAX
Oh, I don't know if that's such a good idea, Madame Duflot--
MADAME DUFLOT

Bon. It is settled. I must prepare for your visite.

Madame Duflot exits in a frantic rush.

EXT. VINEYARD - MORNING

Christie sips coffee and wanders the vineyard. She reaches a wall of brush that marks the end of the property-line. Then notices a small, arch-like opening...and walks through it, finding herself beneath a canopy of dense trees. She advances toward a burst of light that floods through the outlet on the other side of the grove...

Christie finally emerges into the blinding whiteness. When her eyes adjust, she sees she's standing on yet another hectare of vines. Oddly, these vines aren't growing in dark soil, but are planted in gleaming white, limestone rocks. It's otherworldly. She kneels, and scoops up a wilted bunch of embryonic grapes from the soil. Inspects them...as she strolls up to--

A SMALL SHED

Upon which a very old pony is tethered. Christie picks up some grass, which he feeds on, lazily.

DUFLOT (O.S.)
He is called...Syrah.

Christie turns. Duflot steps out of the vines.

CHRISTIE
(in flawless French)
Named after a grape? How appropriate.

DUFLOT
Ah, vous parlez francais?

Christie nods. He takes her hand. Now in English--

DUFLOT
Francis Duflot, vigneron.

CHRISTIE
Christie Roberts, illegitimate daughter.
Duflot studies the pretty, young girl's face. The loss of Henry comes rushing back -- if only for a wounded moment...
DUFLOT
The resemblance to Henry is unmistakable...
(looks more closely)
The nose!

Christie touches her nose, starting to get self-conscious.

CHRISTIE
You knew him well?

DUFLOT
(nodding)
For twenty-three years I toiled side-by-side with your father.
Even now...
(points up to heaven; smiles)
...he works from there...
points to the soil)
...and I from here.

She strokes the pony.

DUFLOT
Syrah was born the year I planted the vines...but now they are both sad and tired.

CHRISTIE
I've noticed. Many of them are withered...
(glancing around)
...except here.

DUFLOT
(re: the hectare)
Ici? It is catastrophic! Nothing but rocks and grief.

CHRISTIE
(points; naively)
They're limestones. They absorb sunlight, then radiate heat at night to keep the vines warm.

Off his look of surprise.

CHRISTIE
(grinning disarmingly)
I'm a wine brat. Spent my summers working at a vineyard in California.
DUFLOT
They do not make wine in California, they make Hawaiian Punch.

CHRISTIE
Mondavi might argue that one.

DUFLOT
Perhaps Henry's daughter would be interested in a personal tour of the vines?
(puts his arm around her)
If we are lucky, his spirit will join us...

Touched, Christie assents. Still curious about the hectare, she motions into the limestone hectare, but Duflot gently tugs her back--

DUFLOT
(in French)
Suivez-moi. This way...

Duflot guides her back through the brush...away from the hectare. She throws a backwards glance: why does she get the feeling he's hiding something?

101
INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - DUSK
Django Reinhart's "Time on My Hands" spills from the house.

102
EXT. VINEYARD - DUSK
Dressed in Henry's best (70's-era flared pants), Max ambles through the vines, en route to Duflot's cottage. Along the way, he plucks some wild roses from the vineyard to make a clean dozen... His Treo vibrates:

MAX
What's happening, Charlie?

CHARLIE (O.S.)
The photos worked like a charm, mate. Offers are flying in like crazy. It's time for me to be on-site. I booked a flight and should be in tomorrow afternoon.

MAX
Terrific. I'll alert the staff.
EXT. DUFLOT'S COTTAGE - EVENING

For a peasant, Duflot is doing rather well for himself. His home is a Provencal hacienda, made of pinkish concrete. In front is a meticulously landscaped flower garden, and enough decorative ironwork to open a showroom.

Duflot awaits on his porch, dressed in black trousers, a black shirt, and a big smile. France's answer to Johnny Cash. As Max crosses the front garden -- BLING! -- a gaggle of plastic swans FLASH ON, lighting Max's path...

DUFLOT
Monsieur Max! Bienvenu! We must have an apero. Allez, allez...

And of course, no French greeting is complete without three kisses on the cheeks. Kiss, kiss, kiss.

OMITTED

INT. KITCHEN - SECONDS LATER

And then through the kitchen...where Madame Duflot is hard at work on dinner...but not so hard at work that she can't greet Max with three kisses--

MADAME DUFLOT
Maxie, Maxie, Maxie...welcome!

Max hands her the roses.

MADAME DUFLOT
Ah, merci! Tres jolie!

EXT. TERRACE - EVENING

Finally, Duflot leads Max out to a small tiled terrace, with a stunning view of the vineyard and the Luberon Valley. Surprise -- Christie's here too, standing by the rail, sipping a Pastis. She looks gorgeous, her hair swept up and a grown-up dress kissing her body. On a trolley, is a mess of appetizers, including a thick earthenware terrine of thrush pate, with the bird's beak protruding from the dark meat.
DUPLLOT
I hope you do not mind, I took the liberty of inviting Henri’s daughter to join us...

Max is slightly annoyed by how Duflot so easily accepts Christie as the real thing.

DUPLLOT
(moves off)
Un moment. I will get you a Pastis.

Christie comes over. She’s eating some pate on a cracker.

CHRISTIE
Bonjour cuz.

Kiss, kiss, kiss.

MAX
I see you’ve managed to ingratiate yourself with the help.
(re: sexy dress)
Where’d you get the Halston?

CHRISTIE
Dad’s closet...and actually it’s a Mary Quant.

MAX
(none the wiser; re: the woman who left the dress behind)
I wonder what she wore home.

TIME CUT
EXT. DINING VERANDA - LATER

All are now buzzed from Pastis. As Max and Christie sit, Duflot makes a tour of the table, pouring everyone a glass of La Siroque wine, while introducing the next phase of dinner.

**DUFLOT**
A simple meal... after a day's work
in the fields...
(points to each dish)
Caviar d'aubergine... Cold puree
of eggplant... Headless larks...

**CHRISTIE**
Headless? Where are the heads? We
didn't, like, eat them already, did we?

**DUFLOT**
... and finally... civet of wild boar
'a la Provence, marinated in red
wine and blood pressed from the
carcass.

**MAX**
Why would one have it any other
way?

Duflot tries to pour wine for Papa, but Papa rudely refuses in an unintelligible language, covering his glass with his hand, which gets drenched. He abruptly gets up and walks to the kitchen.
MADAME DUFLOT
(laughing)
Papa only speaks Provencal; the language of Mistral.

DUFLOT
(ladling the black casserole into plates)
Very few still understand it. It is now practiced exclusively by poets and sodomites.

Papa returns to the table with another bottle of red -- Le Coin Perdu, and a corkscrew. But before he can undo the cork, Duflot rises as if to scold an idiot child.

DUFLOT
Non, Papa! Non!

PAPA
Le Coin, Le Coin!

Both Max and Christie notice how Duflot fights to stop the bottle from being opened. But Papa's a tough old bugger -- and the fight devolves into a wrestling match...

DUFLOT
(struggling and explaining)
Le Coin Perdu...a local vin de garage.

MAX
Vin de garage?

CHRISTIE
(clarifying)
It's a garage wine. Like a boutique wine. Small vineyards, small production, seriously big prices.

Duflot finally wrests the wine away...as Papa mumbles to himself.

DUFLOT
It is overrated.

CHRISTIE
It didn't say that on the Web.
(to Max)
Turns out Le Coin Perdu is a bit of a Provencal legend.
(MORE)
CHRISTIE (cont'd)

It changes hands among collectors, and still, nobody has any idea where it's grown, or who makes it.
Duflot locks the bottle in a cabinet.

DUFLOT

It is time for fromage.

TIME CUT

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

Everyone is swollen, drunk, and loud...there's the cheese plate... And great wedges of tarte aux pommes. And diamond-shaped, almond biscuits... Christie looks anaesthetized. Duflot makes another tour of the table, pouring glasses of a pale, oily liquid...fuel for Max's irritation.

CHRISTIE

What is it?
DUFLOT
Marc de Provence. I made it myself.

MADAME DUFLOT
(to Christie)
It is your father's recipe!

MAX
(fueled; irritated and jealous)
Tell us Madame Duflot: what is it that makes you so sure she is Henry's child?

MADAME DUFLOT
(gesturing)
But of course, the nose.

MAX
Besides that?

An awkward silence as Madame Duflot can't answer. Christie is irritated at being discussed like this.

MAX
Come on, there must be something, anything -- besides that lovely snout -- that can help corroborate her claim...?

(to all)
I mean, did Henry ever discuss California? Or a woman in California? Any drunken moments of candor where he mentioned offspring? I mean, seriously, the last person Henry would breed with is an American.

Duflot shrugs, interrupting.

DUFLOT
(serious observation)
Sadly, in this moment, I see more of Henry in the girl than I do in you.

All eyes turn to Christie, who somehow barely maintains her dignity. Max now openly jealous. She stands, as if about to make an important announcement, and holds onto the table for balance.
CHRISTIE
(hurt)
Max, all I care about is learning about my father...
(MORE)
CHRISTIE (cont'd)
This is my chance to find out who made me...and I don't give a rat's ass if you believe who I am or not...
And with that:

CHRISTIE
Monsieur and Madame Duflot. Thank you for a lovely evening.

MADAME DUFLOT
Papa will walk you back.

CHRISTIE
No, merci. The vines will guide me home.

Christie exits...leaving a silence. Duflot looks to Max:

DUFLOT
(friendly)
Max, it is time to talk business.
You and I. Cigars.

EXT. TERRACE - SECONDS LATER
Max and Duflot have returned to the terrace with Marc and Montecristos. Papa is somnambulant in the background.

MAX
Partnership? You must be barking mad.

DUFLOT
(offers a glass; as if an answer)
More marc?

Max shakes his head.

MAX
Duflot, I looked at the books this morning. Cashflow reports. Capital expenditures. Net income. This place hasn't showed a profit in a decade -- and it baffles me how Henry managed to afford Lamborgini tractors and red Harley's.

DUFLOT
(shrugs: c'est la vie; but uncomfortable)
Henry...he was tres inventif, he always found a way.
MAX
8000 bottles per hectare, multiplied by 11 hectares, divided by your wholesale price per case, with a 30% sell-back ratio, leading to a pre-tax loss of approximately $23,000 euros a year... for ten years. Inventive, very. Believable, no.

DUFLOT
(uncomfortable with Max’s diligence)
It is true that we have experienced some difficult years. But that is not the point, Max... Your Uncle... he was someone special. Un gentilhomme. For me, to start again, with someone new? Non. My heart will not take this change.

MAX
My stomach won’t take anything below true market value.

DUFLOT
Max -- I am prepared to invest everything I have to replant the vineyard. I offer you 50,000 a year... without breaking a finger.
MAX
Duflot, I'm a banker. There's no indication in those records that this vineyard can support that kind of money... Not to mention, my estate agent is coming down tomorrow afternoon to present me with offers. Probably nothing less than two to three million euros. Two mil is life-changing, 50K, before tax, is loose change...

Max senses Duflot's desperation.

MAX (soothing)
Francis...I've already given you my word that I'd press the new owners to accept you as an essential part of the whole deal. I'm sorry...
(rising)
Thank you for dinner. Bonsoir...

Max gets up. Exits. Duflot, defeated. Papa is looking off in the darkness to the vines, as if he is listening to them talk... Papa burps.

PAPA
Asshole.

DUFLOT
Yes, he is.

PAPA
Not him. You.

110 OMITTED

111 EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - NIGHT - MOVING WITH MAX

Max stumbles home through the vineyard, plastered. He suddenly finds himself walking over rocky terrain...and stops to take it in. He's never seen this part of the vineyard, and beneath the moonlight, he tries his best to absorb the lunar-like terrain... Then, he sees Christie, wandering (and limping) in the wrong direction, one shoe in her hand.
MAX
What the hell are you doing?

CHRISTIE
Lost my shoe.

Max considers leaving her there, but then thinks better.

EXT. VINEYARD - NIGHT - MINUTES LATER

Christie piggybacks on Max, holding onto her dangling espadrille, which swings with Max's every inebriated step.

CHRISTIE (upset)
Max? Why can't Henry be my Dad?

MAX
Because now that he's back in my life, I don't want to share him.

CHRISTIE
So you really don't believe me, then?

MAX
Christie...my Uncle put the kama in sutra. Which is a long way of saying he was a womanizer. And by the looks of that photo, your old lady had some fun in her salad days.

CHRISTIE (irritated)
Are you saying she was loose?

MAX
No-- No, I'm saying that Henry was.

CHRISTIE
Max, I know your parents died when you were young. Ludivine told me. My Mom was an only child and I grew up without a Dad too. Doesn't it matter to you that I might be the only blood relative you have?

MAX
Yes, it does matter. That's why I want to be sure.
Christie grabs a few grapes as she passes by a vine. Looks at them.
CHRISTIE  
In this part of the vineyard...  
He's pruning the vines...  
(points)  
See all the dead grapes on the  
ground? It's way too much work for  
a shitty table wine... Max, I  
think that Duflot guy's up to  
something.

MAX  
That's patently obvious.
INT. BASTIDE - FOOT OF THE STAIRS - LATER

On her feet now, Max guides Christie to the foot of the stairs. She stops him by flirtatiously taking his hand. She takes off her other shoe.

CHRIStIE
(mimicking Madame Duflot as if she heard)
You know Max, half the aristocrats in France have liaisons with their cousins.

Her eyes slightly droopy, Christie sways in...as if to kiss Max... Max considers this opportunity. But before he can reciprocate, Christie’s body language changes...and she goes limp...fast asleep in his arms.

MAX
Now you’re starting to act like Henry’s daughter.

Max scoops her up and heads up the stairs...

INT. CHRISTIE’S BEDROOM - SAME

Max has tucked her in. Studies her face, looking for signs of Henry in her. Max can’t help himself. The booze has opened him up. He brushes the hair away from her eyes...

MAX
This was my room when I was a boy.
(looks around)
God, I loved being here with him...
No bedtime, no chores, and best of all, no squabbling adults... I never told him, but those summers saved my childhood.

As he heads for the door--

CHRIStIE
Thanks a million, Max-a-million.

Max stops. Frozen. Can’t speak. No one ever called him that, except...Uncle Henry.

FADE TO BLACK:
EXT. FRONT COURT - NEXT MORNING

Max lies on the bench, going through more of the estate’s accounting records. His Treo rings. He sits up and answers...

INT. LUSTIG BANK - DAY

Amis, Max’s nemesis is on the phone.

AMIS
Max, my boy, so sorry to hear you’re out.

INT. FRONT COURT - CONTINUOUS

MAX
(now alert)
Afraid your intel’s wrong Amis -- but then again, you always were at the back end of the conga... By the way, I forgot to thank you for your generous contribution to my retirement fund.

AMIS
You’ve crossed the line one too many times, Skinner. And as far as LB’s concerned, it’s open season on you and yours.

Amis hangs up, leaving Max just a little bit tweaked...

Just as... a smart BMW coasts down the driveway toward the house. Max walks toward the car... Seconds later, an ELEGANT MAN, 50’s, emerges. He has a quaffed grey goatee and wears a silk ascot and blue blazer with gold buttons.

MAX
Can I help you?

MAN
Ah, oui, anglais... I am Jean-Marie Brunier.

No reaction from Max.
MAN
I was contacted by Nathalie Auzet...to test the vines.

MAX
(after a beat)
The oenologue?!

MONTAGE SEQUENCE...

118
INT. CAVE - DAY

Jean-Marie uses a syringe to suck out some wine from one of the oaking barrels. He tastes, then spits onto the cellar floor. Max watches closely. His Treo rings.

MAX
Gemma. Long time!

118A
INT. LONDON - LAWTON BROTHERS - SAME

Gemma is on her headset--

GEMMA
Max, I’ve just had a vision of you serving Kenny a latte at Starbucks.

MAX
Getting comfortable in my absence, is he?

ANGLE ON - KENNY

As he orders Max’s team around like he’s now the boss.

KENNY
Now hear this: we’re not here for the dental plan!

118B
INT. CAVE - SAME

GEMMA
He’s even taking credit for your trade this week...telling everyone in the office that he was the one who gave you the idea.
MAX
Gemma, if he wasn't a backstabbing runt, I would have never hired him.

GEMMA
But Max--

MAX
A tout a l'heure, Gemma.

Hangs up.

MAX
(to Jean-Marie)
Well?

He spits wine out of his mouth, nearly hitting Max.

JEAN-MARIE
Piquette. (Awful.)

119
EXT. VINEYARD - DAY

Jean-Marie inspects the leaves on the vines. Rips a few off, studies their coloring, smells them.

JEAN-MARIE
Maladie. (Disease.)

120
EXT. VINEYARD - DAY

Jean-Marie walks down a row of vines, pulling off a single grape from each one...until he has collected a hundred. He places them all into a plastic bag, mashes the grapes with his hand, and tastes the mushy liquid -- pits, skins and all... He then scrapes some of the mush into a Refractometer...which looks like a telescope. He holds the mush up to the light to analyze it.

JEAN-MARIE
Pas terrible.

121
EXT. VINEYARD - DAY

Jean-Marie scoops up some soil...rub's it in his hands, spits into his hand and creates a clay-like substance.
JEAN-MARIE

Fiente.

(then translating)

Chickenshit.
CLOSE SHOT - ON MAX

As his eyes drift to the wall of trees that Christie mentioned the night before...

122
EXT. CANOPIED TREE PATH - SECONDS LATER

Max leads Jean-Marie through the darkened tree corridor...

123
EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - DAY

Max surveys the patch. Wow. It looks amazing. Jean-Marie finishes inspecting the vines and comes to Max.

JEAN-MARIE
(arrogant to have his time wasted)
More like a quarry than a vineyard...
(kicks some stones)
One might as well try to grow asparagus in the Sahara...

MAX
Looks very well-kept to me...
(points to grapes)
Why are all those grape bunches on the ground?

JEAN-MARIE
Vendage vert. You cut off two of every three bunches so what's left gets all the nourishment.

MAX
If the land here's so bad, why go through all that trouble?

JEAN-MARIE
Perhaps a peasant’s last attempt to salvage what he could? It is like taking one’s time while cooking Le Mac. The end result will always be Le Mac.

MAX
So then what's the verdict?
JEAN-MARIE
(officious)
The soil is devoid of even the most basic minerals. The vines themselves are far too degraded to produce a respectable grape...
(MORE)
JEAN-MARIE (cont’d)
In summary, it is my professional opinion that -- despite your vigneron’s admirable attempt efforts -- this terroir is beyond help... Frankly, you might consider growing potatoes or squash?

(then)
I will have my office fax the report to Miss Auzet’s office this afternoon....

Jean-Marie walks off. Max, beaten, speechless.

124
EXT. VINEYARD - MINUTES LATER

Max drifts back to the bastide, and sees papers and letters blowing along the ground--

MAX’S POV - AT THE POOL

Christie lying on her stomach on a chaise lounge, suntanning, fast asleep. Beside her are a few old shoe boxes. She was going through Henry’s letters, photos, etc... But the breeze has swept some of them from the boxes. A few are even floating in the pool...

125
EXT. POOL - SECONDS LATER

Max angrily slaps wet papers onto Christie’s back, waking her.

MAX
Wakey, wakey, beach Bunny.
(she opens her eyes)
What do you think you’re doing?
That’s Henry’s private stuff.

CHRISTIE
Did you know that Dad mixed a martini for Winston Churchill? He also danced a waltz with Amelia Earhart...in 1975!

Max snaps the diary out of her hand.

MAX
Christie -- do you want to know about the real Henry Skinner, not the one manufactured by your overactive imagination?
(MORE)
MAX (cont'd)

Henry Skinner was a man so afraid of committing to the real world, that he retreated to a worthless chateau to drink and shag his way to a lonely end.

Max is immediately upset with himself for saying this.

CHRISTIE

Everything I need to know about my Dad is right here...right in front of me...

(sweeps her hand across the estate)

And if this place meant as much to him as I think it did, then you're worse than I thought for even thinking about selling it...

(then, standing)

I'll leave tomorrow.

Christie huffs into the house, her back reddening from too much sun...
EXT. POOL - LATER

Max, miserable, is collecting the photos and papers. He notices a few stray ones have made their way to the pool. He grabs the skimmer and scoops them up. One of them has familiar handwriting...his. He spreads the wet letter on the flat flagstone and reads...

MAX (V.O.)
"Henry. Hope you’re doing your stretches for another summer of tennis and rumba. Bad news -- I’m stuck here at the bank. No holidays for interns. I got the watch, Henry. That really was too much. 1946 Patek Phillipe. Only the best! It certainly puts me way ahead of the Jones’ around here. I’ve moved up from being the coffee boy. My sense of humor is not appreciated, so I just keep my mouth shut. I’m going to have to streamline my attitudes and sharpen my claws if I’m going to get ahead. For all the pressure, it’s still a lark and I’m all about that. Maybe next summer? Keep the Cohibas moist. Max-a-1/4-a million."

Then, Max comes upon a photo...and double-takes. He looks closely: It’s duplicate of Christie’s photo! Shit! He flips the photo around.
Scribbled in green ink in his Uncle's writing it says: "Alison Roberts. The San Francisco Treat."

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S STUDY - MINUTES LATER

Max compares the duplicate photo side-by-side with the one that Christie brought. They are a perfect match... He is stunned. Max's Treo rings.

MAX
Charlie...?

CHARLIE'S VOICE
How's it going, old boy? Working hard on the house?

MAX
(covering)
At it since daybreak. True sense of accomplishment.

CHARLIE
Really? I hate to think of you toiling down there all alone.

MAX
We're English, Charlie. We were born to rule and sacrifice. Where are you?

Max looks out the window and sees Charlie standing in the center of the garden, taking everything in. He's dressed in a double-breasted blazer, pale grey flannel, and a Panama Hat.

CHARLIE
(loudly)
MAX, TAKE MY ORIGINAL ESTIMATE AND SHOVE IT UP MY ARSE! IF I CAN'T GET YOU FIVE MILLION I'M IN THE WRONG SPORT!

Max violently gestures to Charlie to keep his voice down! Christie may be eavesdropping -- and she is...from her attic window.

EXT. POOL - A LITTLE BIT LATER

Max and Charlie sit at the chess table. Max has obviously downloaded Charlie on the oenologue's assessment.
CHARLIE
It's a disaster. Your frog wine man may well have knocked an "f-you" off our sale price.
MAX
(business mode)
Best approach now is to dump the thing as fast as we can, for as much as we can... But don't forget, Duflot's included.
CHARLIE
I'll do my best...provided, of course, that you cover my travel expenses...and a nominal per diem, say, 100 Euros a day.

Smiling, Charlie's in a "win-win."

MAX
You tight-fisted jockey.

CHARLIE
(looking around)
Now then...what's on the agenda? Steak frites? Bottle of Ricard? An evening game of bridge?

MAX
Real men don't play bridge, Charlie. They don't play bridge and they don't dress like Richard Attenborough.
(points to his outfit)
Loosen up for God's sake.

Max gets up.

CHARLIE
Where are you going?

MAX
Obligatory! Cultural activity with an old friend.

CHARLIE
(disappointed)
So that's it, then? You're abandoning your best mate here, all alone?

MAX
Who said you were my best mate? And who said you were alone?

Max points upstairs to Christie's room, where her dress flaps in breeze, drying. Off Charlie's look of unease...

EXT. VILLAGE - EVENING

Lots of cars are parked in all conceivable places: on sidewalks, in driveways, on patios.
Max maneuvers his Uncle's motorcycle and parks it beneath a massive, dense, plein tree. He looks dapper, in one of his Uncle's concoctions. He climbs off the bike, pulls out a bottle of Le Coin Perdu from the pannier, and heads toward the Grand Chateau, as he dials a number...
INT. LONDON - LAWTON BROTHERS - SAME

Kenny's cellphone rings. He answers.
KENNY

Hello?

MAX (O.S.)
Kenny, it's your role model.

KENNY
Max? We thought you were dead...
Why are you calling me on my mobile?

130 EXT. STREET - SAME

MAX
Keep your voice down, and whatever you do, don't look like something big's about to go down... I want you to start selling 20-year gilts short at 99.10.

KENNY
Jesus, Max, that's risky as hell... we could seriously piss off the markets---

MAX
Monday's auction is going to trade like a turd. You want to hunt with the dogs or sit on the porch with the pups? Do as I say, and keep my fingerprints off it. Clear? Are we clear?

KENNY
Alright, Max.

Kenny hangs up and quickly jumps on the squawk box.

KENNY
Yeah, it's Kenny over at Lawton...

131 INT. LUSTIG BANK - AMIS' OFFICE - DAY

As a TRADER ducks his head in to inform Amis:

TRADER
Someone's shorting Monday's gilt issue.
AMIS

(foaming at the mouth)
Skinner! Not this time, you miserable sod!
INT. BASTIDE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Charlie, now in his monogrammed slippers, faces dinner alone. He sits at the table, eating pate, salad, etc... He takes a sip of La Siroque wine. Makes a face.

CHARLIE
Good God, that's awful. Tastes like a gendarme's socks.

CHRISTIE (O.S.)
(weakly)
Anyone there? Hello?

Charlie hopes the cries will go away, but they don't.

CHRISTIE
Anyone! Please!

INT. STAIRCASE - SECONDS LATER

Charlie climbs the stairs, tentatively. Christie peeks down...

CHRISTIE
Who're you?

CHARLIE
(frozen)
Ch-- Cha-- Char-- Max's friend.

CHRISTIE
Okay, listen "Max's friend," I need you to get up here and tell me what my back looks like...

INT. CHRISTIE'S ROOM - SECONDS LATER

Christie is lying on the bed, barebacked, face down, a washcloth covering her butt... Her back is completely toasted. Charlie hovers above, nervously.

CHARLIE
Max didn't say that...you were...
American.

CHRISTIE
California. Born and bred.
CHARLIE
Really? I absolutely adore Californians. Ask anyone...
(then, to her back)
(MORE)
CHARLIE (cont'd)
Well, luv, right now, your back is approximately the color of a ripe pomegranate.

CHRISTIE
Bummer. Okay, you better check the medicine cabinets for some aloe... And if there isn't any, some aspirin and a big bucket of ice'll do.

CHARLIE
Righty ho! On the job--!

Charlie moves to leave--

CHRISTIE
(holding her hand out without turning over)
By the way, I'm Christie.

CHARLIE
(reaching to shake)
How do you do, Christie. I'm Charlie.

CHRISTIE
Love your accent.

INT. STAIRCASE - SAME

As he quickly goes down the stairs--

CHARLIE
Love your bum.

OMITTED

OMITTED

EXT. CHATEAU - EVENING

A lush, grassy field... with old trees anchored to the ground by thick, entangled roots. A flowing water garden ripples beneath the reflection of the dipping summer sun. Ornate candelabras light the area with a flickering glow.
It's a posh crowd, buzzing with talk and laughter. Couples lay on blankets, picnicking with wine and food, surrounding a black Steinway piano, a violin, a cello, and a bass.

An enormous, iridescent movie screen, attached to trees by invisible wires, appears to levitate above the ground.

Max threads his way through the crowd. Suddenly. There. In a slip of a dress and a sparkling array of jewelry -- looking captivating...is Fanny. He takes her in...as she unpacks a delicate display of food onto a white cloth on the grass.

Max is enchanted.

**MAX**

*(smiling)*

Have I mentioned you're a vision?
FANNY
Oui. From the bottom of the pool, when you were peeking up my skirt.

They kiss three times as Max laughs.

MAX
(re: food)
Why don’t you let me serve?

FANNY
(a warning)
I’ve already fired you once this week. Sit.

Max follows orders and sits. He gets to work opening the bottle of Le Coin Perdu.

FANNY
Le Coin Perdu? I’ve never actually seen a bottle.

MAX
You’ve heard of it?

FANNY
It’s very expensive... Are you trying to seduce me, Max?

MAX
I hadn’t thought of it.

FANNY
(smiling)
There’s something you should know about me, Max... I’m very, very choosy.

MAX
Well I’m very, very honored.

FANNY
(challenging)
I’m also very very suspicious. Very very irrational, and I have a very, very short temper.

MAX
Don’t promise me an evening of suspicion and irrational anger if you can’t deliver. I’ve been hurt that way before.
FANNY
I'm also extremely jealous and slow
to forgive. Just so you know.

She serves him canapes.

MAX
Well, this promises to be a lovely
evening.

A QUARTET and a PIANIST enter to APPLAUSE. A silent movie
begins projecting. They begin to play...
EXT. VILLAGE - NIGHT

A storm is approaching. Lightning cuts through the dark sky, violently fracturing it into jagged pieces. Thunder RUMBLES through the valley...

INT. CHRISTIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - OUTSIDE IT RAINS

Charlie anxiously slides an ice cube over Christie's back. She's shivering from the cold. They're bonding...

CHARLIE
Oh, forget Paris. The whole city is closed for the summer -- you'd be lucky to find the subway open.

CHRISTIE
I gotta go somewhere next. (musing) Maybe Venice?

CHARLIE
Sinking, is the rumor. Plus, one false step and you're in a canal, being run over by gondolas...

CHRISTIE
Now London, on the other hand, has it all...including your own personal tour guide... Moi.

CHARLIE
Uh, Charlie.

CHRISTIE
Yes, luv?

CHARLIE
Hands off my ass.

CHRISTIE
(sputtering)
Oh-- Terribly sorry--

EXT. CHATEAU - COURTYARD - NIGHT

Max and Fanny are swept up in the music... Nature complies with art, and it begins to rain.
This is no ordinary rain, though. In seconds, it’s a torrential assault from the heavens. Workers scramble to cover the piano with a tarp, as people scatter to find shelter in the chateau... or in their nearby cars.

EXT. TREE - NIGHT

Max and Fanny rush to Max’s motorcycle, which is parked beneath the tree. The tree’s leaves are dense enough to shield them from most of the rain...

FANNY
Tell me, Max... why did you lose touch with Henri?

MAX
How do you know we lost touch?

FANNY
Oh, he often expressed great sadness; as though all he taught you had been lost.

MAX
You knew him?

FANNY
As a woman living here, it was impossible not to know him.

Max assumes the worst.

MAX
(anxious)
You and he didn’t... rumba--?

FANNY

No.

Max, relieved.

FANNY
(just joking)
But of course I tried.

Max chuckles.

MAX
Henry was the only person I’ve ever loved...
(melancholy)
And I couldn’t even find the time to send the old bugger a postcard.
(MORE)
MAX(cont'd)
For the life of me, I can't work out why I stopped coming here. I love this place.
(nostalgic)
(MORE)
MAX (cont'd)
Henry used to say: "Max-a-million,
there's nowhere else in the world
where you can keep busy doing so
little and enjoy it so much..."

Fanny, bemused, watching him.
FANNY
You always wore your hair like it is now, didn't you?

MAX
That's right.

FANNY
And when you were little, you wore short pants and t-shirts with orange and brown stripes?

MAX
(hopeful)
Yes!

FANNY
(then)
No, I don't remember you.

Max kisses Fanny.
INT. MAX'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Max and Fanny tearing off their clothes, unable to keep their hands off each other...falling onto the bed, a tangle of damp, naked bodies...as we...

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. LA SIROQUE - NEXT MORNING

The rain has stopped. Drip, drip, drip...the estate dries itself off in the rising sun...

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - SAME

Max is fast asleep. Fanny is tiptoeing out of the bedroom, clothes in her hands. Suddenly, we HEAR Charlie SCREAMING from his room:

CHARLIE (O.S.)
FOR THE LOVE OF GOD! SCORPIONS!

Max wakes...catching Fanny halfway to the door.

FANNY
(embarrassed)
I must go to work.

MAX
Isn't that usually the bloke's line?

Fanny caught, sits on the edge of the bed. Max senses that something is off.

FANNY
Max, do you know the reason I spent the night with you?

MAX
Devastating sexual technique?

FANNY
(smiles)
No... It is because once you have done what you came here to do, you will not return. For us, there can be no future...there is safety in that, n'est-ce pas?
Max studies Fanny: obviously she's had some hurtful cataclysm in her romantic past.
MAX
Nothing's preventing us from moving your cafe to Notting Hill. God knows London could use a decent bistro.

FANNY
How typical. To assume that I live in Provence because I have no choice.

MAX
I only meant--
(stops himself)
Fanny... This place... it doesn't fit my life.

FANNY
No Max, it is your life that doesn't fit this place.
(she kisses him)
Au revoir.

She exits... leaving Max in a state of anxious turmoil.

A
EXT. TENNIS COURT - MORNING

Max sits on a wooden bench on the sidelines, depressed, contemplative. Charlie wanders onto the court, hair wet, in a robe, holding a stack of documents.

CHARLIE
Where's your diving board?

MAX
(notices the contracts)
How'd we do?

CHARLIE
I'd be lying if I said the oenologue's report didn't hurt us.

Beat.

MAX
I think I'm in love with her, Charlie.

CHARLIE
I don't blame you, mate, she's a goddess -- even if she is your cousin.
MAX
Not Christie, you twat, Fanny.

CHARLIE
Oh.

MAX
Charlie, I’ve been thinking. Maybe
I shouldn’t--

Charlie snaps into crisis-mode, knowing full well where Max
is headed...

CHARLIE
Max, right now you’ve got the scent
of eau du French girl on your
body... But after a cold shower...

MAX
I could use it as my pied-a-
terre...a vacation getaway.

CHARLIE
Do you remember what happened when
your mentor took his first vacation
in fifteen years?

MAX
I stole his job.

CHARLIE
Max Skinner doesn’t do weekends,
and he doesn’t do vacations. He
makes money. So do what you do
best Max...

He plops the contract on Max’s lap. A gust of white
pissenlit flowers swirls around Max and Charlie...looking
like the Provencal version of a snow storm...

Without even looking at it, Max signs the contract.

MAX
(relieved)
You’ll stay to sort the new
owners...?

CHARLIE
As long as you’re payin’, I’m
stayin’.

Max stands. Then remembers:
MAX
What about Duflot? Make sure they keep him on.
CHARLIE
I tried. They said no.

Damn, Max was hoping to avoid a messy ending...

148
EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - DAY

Max wanders past Syrah... to a lonely place in the VINEYARD, where he stops...

148A
WE ARE NOW IN A FLASHBACK... YOUNG DUPLLOT (20'S) is on bended knee, weeding the soil. Young Max spies on him from behind the vines... and can hear him sing the lilting aria "Flower Song" from Carmen.

DUPLLOT
La fleur que tu m'avais jetée.
Dans ma prison m'était restée.

Uncle Henry appears... and kneels beside to Max.

YOUNG MAX
Why's he singing to them, Uncle Henry?

UNCLE HENRY
Max, the terroir needs more than sun and rain... more even than the loving hand of a winemaker... It needs harmony. It needs balance.

Henry stands up and Young Max follows. They start to walk side-by-side... row by row...

HENRY
You see, Max, balance in wine is as elusive as balance in life... In life, it requires a heart that can listen. Notice, Max, the first four letters of heart are h-e-a-r... Take note: since a balanced wine can only be produced by a balanced vine -- it stands to reason that a balanced life can only be produced by a balanced man. It is therefore your charge, boy, to find that which brings harmony to your terroir, take hold of it, and never... ever... let it go...

WE ARE BACK THE PRESENT...
Max is now upon Duflot, who is on his hands and knees, weeding the soil...
DUFLOT
My whole life, people laughed at me for singing to my vines... I explained that, someday, the vines would sing back...

(beat)
Here, they finally have...
(standing; razor sharp eyes)
You don't know what you are doing.

MAX
What are you talking about?

DUFLOT
(passionately)
Ici. Le Coin Perdu.

Duflot takes a bunch of grapes from the vines and crushes them in his fists, juice spilling all over him...

MAX
That's impossible. The oenologue said--

DUFLOT
The oenologue was paid to say that!

Max, paralyzed.

DUFLOT
We thought that if you believed La Sirogue had no value, you would leave things as they were. Status quo.

MAX
We?

DUFLOT
These vines -- they are illegal. Your Uncle and I needed someone who could help find loopholes to slip through. A notaire...

MAX
(dawning on him)
Auzet?!

DUFLOT
She is a clever woman. Over time she became the negociant for Henry and myself.

(MORE)
DUFLOT (cont'd)
And now she is my partner... She
was merely trying to protect our
secret.
Max, aghast.

MAX
Why didn’t you tell me about this?
Why didn’t you trust me!

DUFLOT
Max, would you trust you?
(ouch; that hurt)
Your Uncle always intended to leave
the estate to you...but he worried
about what you had become. "My
nephew is selfish," he used to
say." "How can I give La Siroque
to a man who can’t even appreciate
the simple pleasures of life?" So
it was never written. Alas, fate
snatched him before he could decide
what to do...

MAX
(more or less devastated)
...and I’ve sold it.

DUFLOT
(philosophic)
Then you have done the very thing
your Uncle feared you would do.
You have sold his spirit to the
highest bidder, Max. And betrayed
the only man who ever cared for
you...

Duflot picks up a stone--

DUFLOT
Here, Max. Here was Henry’s f-
you money...

--and lobbs it at Max, who catches it.
Abruptly, Duflot walks off... THE CAMERA CLOSES IN ON MAX...who stands among the vines. A gentle breeze blows across the vineyard, fluttering the leaves...

149A INT/EXT. SMART CAR - MOVING - DAY

Max drives, and notices Christie walking along the side of the road, her knapsack on her back. Max lowers the window, and slows down.

MAX
Where you headed?

CHRISTIE
Not exactly sure.

MAX
At your age, that's the best destination...
(them)
How 'bout a lift?

CHRISTIE
(re: small car)
Where would I sit, the glove compartment?

Max smiles.

CHRISTIE
I'd rather walk.

MAX
Here--

Max holds out the copy of "Death in Venice."

MAX
You never finished.

CHRISTIE
It's your book, Max, you keep it.

MAX
I want you to have it... Come on. The ending may surprise you.

She takes the book, stuffs it into her bag...

MAX
Christie?
A long silence...
MAX
You do have his nose...

They hold eyes on each other.

MAX
Au revoir...

CHRISTIE
(touched)
Au revoir, cuz.

Max pulls out.

REVERSE SHOT - ON CHRISTIE

We are moving away from Christie...and as she recedes, we begin to hear...

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE
Dear Max...I know it's been many years since we last spoke, but I find myself in a bit of a jam and I'm afraid I need your help...

OMITTED

INT. MARIGNANE AIRPORT - DAY

Max striding through the terminal toward the check-in counter.

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE
The thing is, Max old boy, I'm dying... I know this because Dr. Khan, my physician, has stopped talking about my health and begun discussing the weather...

EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - DAY

duflot wanders through the vines beneath a parasol, deflated.
tati follows, dejected.
UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE
Convinced that Death, like all tradesmen, would be unable to find my front door...
Madame Duflot appears from the vines and takes her husband’s arm, trying to console him.

EXT. MARIGNANE AIRPORT - RUNWAY - DAY

A jet speeds down the runway...

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE
...and having always believed wills to be written invitations to the reaper, I find myself impelled to impress upon your kindness...

...and takes off into the cloudless sky...

EXT. AVIGNON TRAIN STATION - DAY

Christie gets out of a sputtering Renault, and waves goodbye to the people who dropped her off. (Obviously she hitched a ride.)

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE
I have a daughter... Her name is Christie Roberts. Sadly, we have never met...

INT. RENAISSANCE CAFE - DAY

Dinner rush. For a moment, Fanny looks over to where Max was the other night, helping her as a waiter. A moment of regret...

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE
Her mother's name was Allison. She was a tour guide at a tiny vineyard in Northern California.

INT. TGV SPEED TRAIN - SAME

The train is just pulling out of the station. Christie wobbles up the aisle, finds an open seat, and places her bag on the rack above her. She reaches into her bag and pulls out her book, "Death in Venice." Something falls out. An envelope, with her name on it.
UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE

Max, I should like you to find her... And to this end I should like to leave her what is rightfully hers...

INT. HEATHROW - DAY

A DRIVER holds a card that reads "Skinner." Max exits with a crowd of people...and motions to the Driver...

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE

I hope this decision doesn't hurt your feelings -- and as successful as you are -- you don't need it. I hope you understand.

EXT. LA SIROQUE - DAY

A crumbling mess of beauty, glistening beneath the magic hour light. Charlie, dressed in a crisp suit, greets a MIDDLE-AGED FRENCH COUPLE, who climb out of a silver Mercedes. The new owners.

CHARLIE

Delighted to meet you, Mr. and Mrs. Bouffard...

(he shakes)

Unfortunately, there's been a slight, how shall I say, wrinkle with the sale.

MR. BOUFFARD

What sort of wrinkle?

CHARLIE

The American sort.

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE

Because for me, even in its present state, La Siroque is a place of magic...

INT. TGV SPEED TRAIN - SAME

The train rips through the French countryside. Christie opens the envelope. Inside, she finds both photos, as well as Uncle Henry's letter to Max -- which is written in green ink, in a flowing Italianate. She begins to read...
UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE
And it is my heartfelt wish that
Christie should share in that
magic...

161 INT. MAX'S FLAT - DUSK 161

Max enters the austerity of his hip flat. Puts his keys on a steel counter. Removes Henry's sandals, still covered with Provencal dust and drops them in the trash.
UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE
I like to think of her there...
After all...she and La Siroque are
all I leave behind...

Then, as an afterthought, he takes them out.

INT. TGV SPEED TRAIN - DAY - MOVING

Christie finishes Uncle Henry's letter, overcome with emotion...

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE
Your loving Uncle...
(Max signs)
Henry Skinner...

OMITTED
INT. LAWTON BROTHERS - MORNING

Max strides through the bullpen. Is acknowledged by the other Traders.

BROKER 1
Genghis! Back from the dead!

MAX
Lose the Christmas tie Justin, you look like a bloody accountant.

BROKER 2
Welcome back boss.

Max offers a high five and pulls out, leaving him hanging.

KENNY (O.S.)
You wanker!

Max turns -- there's Kenny, carrying his cubicle belongings in a cardboard box: he's been canned. He's escorted out by two SECURITY GUARDS.

MAX
Kenneth! Nice haircut! Don't tell me you've been fired in my absence!

KENNY
You set me up, you sod! Your short order... Did my nuts in in less than an hour. Lost us six million quid, you bastard.

MAX
(innocently)
That's unfortunate Kenny, but I was on suspension, how could it have anything to do with me?

Gemma falls into stride with him.

GEMMA
Good holiday? You look different.

MAX
Very relaxing thank you, Gemma. Bring me everything I need to read to get me up to date. And a double-espresso.
GEMMA
On your desk in five...
(with trepidation)
Sir Nigel is waiting for you.

Max stiffens. She looks genuinely worried.

INT. SIR NIGEL’S OFFICE - DAY

A massive white and glass space of plasma screen data flow and sharp edges. Max walks across the expanse of floor to Sir Nigel. He’s on the phone, speaking in fluent German.

Completely ignores Max. Max stands there. A power game.

On the wall behind Sir Nigel he sees a Van Gogh of a rolling Provençal landscape. Exquisite swirls of color and texture. Sir Nigel hangs up, and peruses some papers without looking up.

SIR NIGEL
Van Gogh.

MAX
I hope you’ve got a good lock on the door, Sir.

SIR NIGEL
Don’t be soft. It’s not real. Real one’s in my vault. It’s a copy. How much? Guess? Go on.
(before he can)
Two hundred grand. For a knock off. Sit.

Max follows orders.

SIR NIGEL
Art’s a passion Max. You gotta have passions. I have. For tons of things. Horses, sports cars, money...

MAX
Are those passions or vices?

Sir Nigel explodes.
SIR NIGEL
HAVE I FINISHED TALKING?! When I’ve finished talking, that’s when you talk, and it better be good!

Nigel bangs his desk.

SIR NIGEL
While you were off on your little holiday, I’ve been through a shitstorm!

MAX
Sir, I appreciate my actions may have caused--

Sir Nigel holds up his hand, stopping him--

SIR NIGEL
I’ve always liked you Max. You’re one of the ballsiest traders in the Square Mile. That’s why you’re here. If it was up to me I wouldn’t do this, this is straight from the Brothers. You’ve just got to learn there’s consequences to your sort of behavior. Sorry. But there it is.

He slides an envelope across the table.

SIR NIGEL
You’ve got one hour.

166
INT. HALLWAY - DOWNSTAIRS - MINUTES LATER

Max rides the escalator downstairs. Gemma awaits, biting her lip. As he arrives--

GEMMA
Shall I pack my Smurfs?

Max doesn’t answer. Gemma follows him. She’s concerned, this is worse than she thought.

GEMMA
Shit Max... What happened?

He hands her the envelope, unopened. Walks off.
INT. MAX’S OFFICE - MINUTES LATER

Max sits in his chair, feet up on his window sill, studying the enemy bank’s skyscraper...

FLASHBACK:

OMITTED

EXT. LA SIROQUE - POOL - DUSK - FLASHBACK

Young Max is wading in the pool. Uncle Henry, in swimming trunks and terry bathrobe, appears above him--

UNCLE HENRY

Max...would you mind entertaining Ms. Chenal’s daughter while I give her mother a tour of the estate?

Uncle Henry smiles lasciviously at MS. CHENAL, 40’s, who pushes FANNY, 10, forward to meet Max. Even at this age, she’s gorgeous and a bit dangerous. Max turns red with typical adolescent embarrassment.

YOUNG MAX

But I really want to finish the last chapter of “Death in Venice.”

UNCLE HENRY

Given the book’s title, I don’t expect you’ll be surprised by the ending, Max.

(to Mother; as they go)

Come now, Ms. Chenal, there are many attractions here at La Siroque, beginning with the view, which, fortuitously, is best appreciated from my bedroom...

Uncle Henry and Ms. Chenal’s shuffle off...leaving Max alone with Fanny...

FANNY

Je m’apelle Fanny. Et toi?

Max can barely answer, his face crimson with discomfort.
YOUNG MAX
(eyes down)
Er... Je...m'apelle...Max.
With fearless abandon, Fanny slips off her shorts, and in only panties and a tank top, dives into the pool. She swims underwater, and pops up, right across from Max, her blue eyes sparkling in the dipping summer sun. Then, for no apparent reason, she gives Max his first kiss, then whispers in his ear.

INT. MAX'S OFFICE - SAME - PRESENT

Gemma stands at the door, holding the envelope, and the check which was inside.

GEMMA
That's a lot of zeros.

MAX
Or partnership. My choice.

GEMMA
Listen to mummy: Max, partner, you're made for life. Sir Nigel didn't make partner till he was fifty-three. And look at him.

MAX
Yeah. Look at him.

GEMMA
Well, what the hell are you gonna do?
INT. SIR NIGEL'S OFFICE - LATER

Max stares at the painting. The colors swirl over the landscape like a blazing Provencal heat haze.

The door opens: Nigel enters with an air of benevolence.

SIR NIGEL
What's it to be? Money or yoke?

Max ignores him studying the painting.

MAX
When do you look at it?

SIR NIGEL
What?

Max studies the painting.

MAX
The real one. I mean... do you go down to the vault and stand there in front of it. Is that it, Nigel?

SIR NIGEL
What's your point Skinner? Have you made your decision?

Sir Nigel turns to look at the painting.

HARD CUT TO:
INT. RENAISSANCE CAFE - DAY

CLOSE SHOT - THE VAN GOGH PAINTING

Hanging on the cafe wall. But for some reason, it looks different than before... Different frame, maybe? Fanny passes it by, unaware, carrying food...

EXT. RENAISSANCE CAFE - DAY

People sit outside. Fanny comes out with some plates as a Vespa tears past. She shouts after the rider, for nearly knocking her over.

Flustered, Fanny comes to a table to take an order.

FANNY
Bonjour. Vous desirez quelque-chose? (Have you decided?)

A menu lowers. It's Max.

MAX
I think so.

FANNY
(recovering)
Sure you don't need more time?

MAX
No. I think I know what I want.

FANNY
You're sure?

MAX
Pretty sure.

FANNY
So. What is it to be?

He looks at Fanny for a long time.

MAX
How's the soup?

FANNY
The soup is finished.

MAX
Like my job.
Fanny lowers her pad, surprised.
MAX
(then)
The fish.

FANNY
We've run out.

MAX
That's like me...with excuses.
PANNY
Don't waste my time. Choose something we have.

MAX
I would like a lifetime spent with a suspicious irrational goddess. Some short tempered-jealousy on the side. I'd also like a bottle of wine that tastes like you...and a glass that's never empty.

He kisses her.

MAX
Forgive my lips...they find joy in the most unusual places.

FANNY
You remember what I whispered to you...when we were kids in the pool?

MAX
It appears that you do too.

FANNY
(nodding)
Bien sur. But it was not until just now that I recognized you, Max.

They kiss as we...

DISSOLVE TO:

173

EXT. LA SIROQUE - A FEW WEEKS LATER

It's a wonderful September day. A cloudless, sunny sky, with a soft breeze fanning through the valley...
EXT. FRONT VINEYARD - SAME

Vendage! A crew of GYPSY PICKERS carry straw baskets filled with grapes, clipping the grapes off the vines. Tati darts through their legs, chasing a rabbit...

EXT. BASTIDE - DAY

Max sits on the edge of the wall, watching the pickers do their work, shirt-top opened. He looks a helluva lot like Henry... From inside the house, he can begin to hear THE SOUND OF SCREAMING...

EXT. BASTIDE - SAME

Max sits on the step, listening to Christie and Duflot in the middle of a titanic, knock-down, drag-out row in the hall. They are bellowing in French, holding some vines. They seem to be fighting over how high, or low, to cut the stems...

Duflot appears in front of Max--

DUFLOT
Max! Thank God you are here! I will not work for this madperson!
Jamais! Jamais!

Duflot steps over to Max, and whispers, conspiratorially:

DUFLOT
But I love this woman!

Duflot storms off as Christie appears and gives him the finger. Tati barks at Duflot, and stays with Christie. She turns to Max--

CHRISTIE
I can't deal with this asshole,
Max! He's gotta remember who the owner is -- me!
(frustration)
The French! What's with their attitude? This morning I'm on the phone for two hours with the wine authorities. They're total crooks...

MAX
Want me to soften them up?
CHRISTIE
You’re hired.

Max continues to sit in the sunshine as Christie turns to go, then pauses. An afterthought:

CHRISTIE
Oh, by the way, Max, you were running low on green ink, so I bought you some more... Paperwork’s up in Dad’s study.

He and Christie lock eyes.

CHRISTIE
You never know...you may need to write a letter or something.

Then, turns to jog after Duflot.

CHRISTIE
Tati!
(calling out)
Duflot, wait!

She heads out after Duflot and Tati follows. As, Max’s Treo rings. He heads outside...

MAX
So. How’s the sale going?

INT. MAX’S APARTMENT - SAME
Charlie is in Max’s apartment. A couple of large Hip Hoppers are checking it out (like Ali G). Gemma is there too, aloof but patient.

CHARLIE
Plays in this bracket shift in a blink. I’m confident of 1.8. Maybe even 1.9...

GEMMA
(to hip hopper who’s feet are now on the coffee table)
Feet off, Jamal.

Jamal complies, politely. Gemma sits down next to him, marginally flirtatious.
GEMMA
So, you're an actual rapper?
EXT. BASTIDE - SAME

Max watches as Fanny and Madame Duflot periodically enter the frame...placing lunch on the table, adjusting flowers, uncorking wine, etc...

MAX
Bullshit Charlie. I paid 1.3 two years ago, and I've put two hundred thou into it. You get me a twenty five percent yield or I get myself another estate agent.

INT. MAX'S APARTMENT - SAME

Charlie smiles warmly. Same old Max.

CHARLIE
You realize, of course, you'll never last down there.
MAX (O.S.)
You takin' odds on that?

180  EXT. BASTIDE - SAME

CHARLIE (O.S.)
And as impossible as it may seem...
Max watches Fanny sway back towards him, her beauty all the more perfect in this moment... She gives him a glass of Rose, tussling his hair, and disappears back inside.

CHARLIE
...the very things you find sexy and unique now will soon become the dread of your day-to-day existence...

MAX
Is that a fact?

CHARLIE
And then, after months of eating, drinking, sleeping, and bonking, what have you got to look forward to? Boredom!

* Fanny reappears carrying plates of food, hips swinging back to the lunch table...

CHARLIE
Max, you're my best mate and I'm telling you: you won't last!

He sips the wine.

MAX
Mmmm. A good year.
(smiles)
We'll see, Charlie. We'll see.

Max hangs up. Fanny gestures to him to come to the table.
He does.

At a distance, Christie is walking back toward them with Tati. Duflot seems to be following, as Madame Duflot comes out with a giant dish of antipasti.

* FANNY
Okay. That tree. It is not a tree anymore. It's an arbre..
Arbre.

FANNY
See that bird. C'est L'Oiseau.

MAX
L'Oiseau.

Tati runs past.

FANNY
That blue dog. C'est un chien bleu.

MAX
Chien bleu.

As they continue, the CAMERA drifts away from them...taking in the garden, and the tennis court, and the pool, and then the vineyard, and then finally, La Siroque...just a tiny piece of terroir in a very big world.

FIN