A GOOD YEAR

a screenplay by

Marc Klein

Based on the novel by Peter Mayle

4.29.05
EXT. LE GRIFFON - NIGHT

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
ces soir par Josephine 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 accouterments... 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 Russell 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 Le Griffon -- all the planting, all the harvesting, all the fermenting -- it’s nothing more than the art of bottling truth. *Par exemple*: 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 - INVESTMENT BANKING FLOOR - MORNING

It's an enormous money-making factory. Work stations stretch for as far as the eye can see...manned by the masters of the financial universe.

ANGLE ON - BOND TRADING BULLPEN

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, glances at his computer--

KENNY
It's up to 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 Fucker, Kenny. 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, where he just

Destruct sequence.

GEMMA

(into phone)

Very sorry Kimberly, Mr. Skinner is at an ashram in India...

KENNY

115.40?

MAX

(bolts up)

That’s close. Everyone get ready...

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...

KENNY

115.50.

MAX

That’s it! Go!
INT. LONDON - DEUTSCHE 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. DEUTSCHE BANK - SAME

Amis studies his screen, wary.

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

(MORE)
AMIS (CONT'D)
(panicked)
Mother Mary, that filthy bugger
forced down prices, now he's gonna
buy everything back on the cheap!

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...

GEMMA
(playful)
Max, when you die, they should
bury you face down so you know
which way you’re headed...

INT. LOCAL PUB - NIGHT

The place is filled with plasma screens that broadcast
business reports from all over the world. Max and his
team are crowded around the bar, watching the Beeb’s
evening financial report.

ANCHOR
...and while not technically
illegal, Lawton Brothers actions
this morning represented an
unprecedented breach of financial
etiquette...

Kenny steps up on the bar. Raises his pint to toast:

KENNY
To my hero, Max Skinner. If
there's a loophole, he'll find it!

Applause and cheers. Max is goaded up onto the counter.

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

ALL IN UNISON
...IT'S THE ONLY THING!”
EXT. MAX'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

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.

INT. MAX'S APARTMENT BUILDING - LOBBY

Max enters, tapping away on his Blackberry. He passes his doorman, BERT, who hands Max his mail as he enters the elevator.

BERT
You mighta tipped me off, Mr. Skinner. In lieu of a Christmas gift, I mean.

INT. ELEVATOR - MOVING UP

Max skims through his mail. Mostly junk, but there's one intriguing envelope with a French stamp. In the top left-hand corner is a small, stylized image of the statue of Justice, and below is printed the senders name: CABINET AYZET, NOTAIRES, RUE DES REMPARTS, 84160, LOURMARIN. He opens the letter, visibly softening as he reads it...

INT. HALLWAY - MAX'S FLOOR - SECONDS LATER

Ping. Elevator doors open. Max stares at the letter, numb. All we hear is the sound of the fan above him.

MAX
(simply)
Fuck.

INT. MAX'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING

Tastefully decorated with all the requisite rich-boy gadgets. Walls of glass give the impression that the place is literally floating in the foggy, night sky. Max rests his forehead against the window, staring vacantly into the murky abyss beneath him, gripping the letter.

MAX

Fuck.
INT. TOWN CAR - NEXT MORNING - MOVING

Raining like hell. En route to work, Max is listening to Gemma, who sits in back with him.

MAX
What do you mean he died three months ago?

GEMMA
I spoke to the notaire handling his estate this morning; the one who sent the letter. Turns out your Uncle hadn’t updated his will in over twenty years. And in typical French fashion, it took them three months to locate you.

MAX
What about the deed? Is that gonna turn up with the WMD’s?

GEMMA
Longer than that if you don’t get down there and sign the paperwork. I set an appointment with the notaire -- a Ms. Nathalie Auzet -- for three tomorrow afternoon.

MAX
Gemma, I’m not goin’ to France this week. I need to take a few victory laps around the City first.

He holds up the newspaper, waving the headline of the Financial Times: “LAWTON SCORES BIG IN DAWN RAID.”

GEMMA
Tell me something Max: did you care for him much?

Who?

GEMMA
Your Uncle.

MAX
Of course.

GEMMA
Well it sure would be nice to see it.
Max pauses for a beat. What is she talking about?

INT. HIP RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Swarms of Notting Hill lovelies fill the restaurant. CHARLIE WILLIS, 40, a pompous, overweight, real estate broker sits alone in a booth, swirling a glass of wine, watching all the beautiful women with a combination of terror and awe. Good odds say he's not a ladies' man.

Max enters...and Charlie watches him skillfully wade through the crowd of admiring women, kissing many, whispering to others. Max slides into the booth--

MAX
So what's it worth?

CHARLIE
(affronted)
Max, you vulgarian, barely a day since you learned your long-lost Uncle -- your own flesh and blood -- died and left you everything he owned. And still, the only thing on your mind is money.

MAX
The very Uncle you speak of once taught me that every man needs a "fuck you million" in the bank. I've simply decided that I want to say "fuck 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
Well, it's been a while since I've been there... But I think there were about a half dozen bedrooms. A decent-sized kitchen. Oh yeah, there's also the vineyard. About twenty hectares.

CHARLIE
Bloody hell, Max. Sounds like an estate to me. A chateau.
MAX
Yeah? What's a chateau goin' for
these days? Discreetly, I mean.

Charlie muses over the image of a Provencal palace, as he
sniffs his wine.

CHARLIE
At least a "fuck you." Maybe two.

MAX
(delighted)
Bless that old dipsh! So? Will
you sell it?

CHARLIE
I won't cut my commission.

MAX
I didn't ask you to, you greedy
bastard.

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

INT. AIRPLANE - FIRST CLASS - IN FLIGHT - NEXT MORNING

The camera slowly tracks up the aisle...passing rows of
businesspeople, all hunched over their laptops and PDA's.
We stop on Max, who, like everyone else, is tapping away,
lost in a digital brick wall of spreadsheets...

EXT. MARSEILLE - MARIGNANE AIRPORT - DAY

Finally, the sun! Max emerges from the terminal, tapping
away on his Blackberry. He doesn't notice the mile after
cloudless mile of picture perfect sky.

EXT. ALAMO CAR RENTAL LOT - MINUTES LATER

Holding his car keys, Max walks along the stalls, passing
rows of sporty Peugeots and Renults, counting them down
until he finds his car...a tiny, lime-green, Smart Car.

MAX
Damnit Gemma!

With no time to waste, Max squeezes into the Smart Car
and starts the engine.
A pussy-ass French pop song BLARES from the speakers, "Moi Lolita." Max adjusts the rearview mirror and sees all of the rental car EMPLOYEES staring out the window, mocking him with laughter...

MAX

Bloody Frogs.

INT. MAX’S CAR – MOVING – DAY

Max speeds along the N7 freeway, alternately looking at a map, and typing out e-mails on his Blackberry. The song "Moi, Lolita" comes on again. Max never once notices the beautiful scenery zooming past him.

EXT. SMALL TOWN – CAFE – LATER

Max has the map and a cup of espresso on the hood of his car. He loosens his tie, as a crowd of LOCALS try to explain where he needs to go...in French. He has no clue what they’re saying. He looks at his watch. Dammit. A man holds a fish by it’s tail and tries to sell it to Max.

LATER

Max crosses the Durance River. Lost, he pulls over and studies the map. He u-turns and heads back in the other direction. The song "Moi Lolita" comes on again... Max changes the station, but it’s also playing the song...

INT. LONDON – LAWTON BROTHERS – LATER

Gemma sits in front of her computer, looking at a map on the internet, guiding Max by phone.

GEMMA

...now, all you need to do is turn a sharp right...

MAX (O.S.)

Sharp right. Okay.

GEMMA

...and you should see the entrance to the freeway.

Beat.
MAX (O.S.)
Do me a favor, Gemma: call the notaire and have her leave the keys in the mailbox...then reschedule our appointment for first thing tomorrow morning.

GEMMA
Max, what’s the matter? What do you see?

EXT. FRANCE - MAX’S CAR - SAME
Max has pulled into a barnyard of cows.

MAX
Your bonus.

Moo.

EXT. ESTATE - LATE AFTERNOON
Max drives up to a stone gate. The name of the property can be made out, etched in crumbling stone: LE GRIFFON. Neat rows of vines surround the house. Max retrieves a set of keys from the mailbox. They are huge, brass keys, like something out of “The Count of Monte Cristo.”

EXT. DETACHED GARAGE - SAME
Max parks in a rickety detached garage. He grabs his bag and heads toward the house.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - SAME
Memories flood back as Max’s eyes brush over the unkept garden, the stone bassin (pond), and the bastide (farmhouse) itself, whose facade could definitely use a coat of paint... Max is quickly enveloped by the lucid stillness and quiet.

INT. BASTIDE - ENTRYWAY - SAME
Max keys himself in. He can make out the broad steps of a stone staircase rising into the darkness.

MAX
Halloo? ‘Allo?

No answer. No one’s here to greet him.
INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Max flicks on the lights. He’s standing in a cavernous kitchen with a cast-iron range and a big wooden plank table in the center of it. Max opens the fridge. It’s filled with fresh eggs, milk, cheese, etc. Clearly, someone has been expecting him.

INT. UNCLE HENRY’S STUDY - MINUTES LATER

Max enters his Uncle’s study. It’s cozy and filled with many personal mementos. He sees an old Victrola, with a dusty 78 sitting on it. Curious, he places the needle on the record. It’s Noel Coward singing “Room With a View.”

Max looks things over. A wall of books with lots of Graham Greene and Somerset Maugham. A humidor with some dried-out Cohibas. A pair of vintage binoculars. And a single framed photo: Uncle Henry with Young Max happily crushing grapes with their feet...

Max also unearths a photo album. Inside, he flips through dozens of photos of Uncle Henry (at various ages), with a harem of beautiful women from all over the world. The guy was a lothario, no doubt about it.

EXT. LE GRIFFON - VINEYARD - SAME

Meanwhile...out in the vines...sitting on an idling tractor, is the estate’s winemaker, CLAUDE ROUSSEL, 60’s, brawny, sunburned, with the hardened muscles of a man who’s worked the land for a lifetime. Roussel stares anxiously at the bastide, noting the solitary light coming from Uncle Henry’s study. He talks into his cell:

ROUSSEL

Ludivine? Il est arrivé. (He has arrived.)

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 ROUSSEL, 50’s, a haughty, overly-made up dragon with orange hair. She’s on the phone.
MADAME ROUSSEL
When will they ever stop invading France?

ROUSSEL (O.S.)
It cannot be anything but trouble. He will want to tear out the vines and build a nuclear power station.

MADAME ROUSSEL
The only way to find out is to go and speak with him....

EXT. VINEYARD - SAME

MADAME ROUSSEL (O.S.)
...And for heaven's sake, Clo-Clo, don't go with a face like a boot. Go with a smile.

Roussel nods. Hangs up. And pulls out, his tractor put-put-ting back into the vines...

CLOSE SHOT - MAX'S BARE FEET - LATER

On the dewy grass... He wiggles his toes... CAMERA PULLS BACK TO REVEAL...

EXT. GARDEN - DUSK

Max stands beside the table where he played chess with his Uncle. His jacket's off, and his crumpled shirt tails are pulled out of his trousers. We can HEAR the faint strains of the Noel Coward record from above. Max is enjoying this, and doesn't even know it...

Max eagerly pours himself a glass of the latest Le Griffon vintage. Takes a sip. Awful! He can barely swallow it. Tannic and flat... Just then, the sound of a TENNIS BALL being volleyed drifts into the garden. Who could be playing tennis now?

EXT. TENNIS COURT - SECONDS LATER

It's a tarnished 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 RIGHT

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 Bjorn Borg.

YOUNG MAX
It’s too dark to play Uncle Henry.

UNCLE HENRY
Nonsense, Max, at your age I could
spot an emu in the Outback from a
good five miles away.

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 around the court in celebration.
Pissed, Young Max slams his racket to the court.

YOUNG MAX
YOU DON’T HAVE TO RUB IT IN!

Uncle Henry continues to gloat...until he sees Young Max
looking dejected and defeated.

UNCLE HENRY
Humility, Max, is a concept
entirely cooked up by life’s
losers. If one can’t feel joy in
success, one mustn’t attempt it in
the first place... The real
question, of course, is why you
aren’t celebrating.

YOUNG MAX
Duh. Because I lost.

Uncle Henry pours himself a refill from a day cooler on
the court.
UNCLE HENRY
Max...a man should celebrate his
losses as deeply and as often as
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!

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...to those willing to find
it.

Uncle Henry and Young Max walk past Max, AND WE ARE BACK
IN THE PRESENT... Max is touched, the warm memory
evoking long buried feelings of affection.

EDGE OF VINEYARD - SECONDS LATER

En route back to the house, Max’s path is blocked by --
BARK! BARK! -- a terrier with a blue head.

VOICE
Salut Max!

Roussel appears from out of the vines...and before Max
can react, kisses him on both cheeks, then bearhugs him.
Roussel’s a real sweaty guy with a persistent swarm of
gnats whirling around him. Max is repulsed.

MAX
Russell?
ROUSSEL
(amused)
All these years and still your French has not improved! It is Roussel. Ro-o-sell.

MAX
My God...you're...mature.

ROUSSEL
C'est vrai. The floods of '78. The Mistral of '86. Fanleaf disease in '93. With each vintage I have corked away another year of my youth.

BARK! BARK!

ROUSSEL
My dog, Tati.

Max stares down at the blue terrier.

ROUSSEL
(gestures; c'est la vie)
Spraying the vines.

Tati embraces Max's ankle in an amorous clasp. Max jerks his leg, trying to free himself.

ROUSSEL
I expect you are hungry, no? Please, come, my wife Ludivine is tonight roasting a rack of lamb--

MAX
(excuse)
Thanks, but I don't have much of an appetite these days...since I learned about Uncle, you see.

ROUSSEL
(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
(jerking harder)
I'm happy that someone was here to take care of him.
ROUSSEL
My wife will come in the morning...with croissants.

MAX
Oh no -- that's not necessary.

ROUSSEL
Ludivine cleaned for Henri until the very last day. A veritable tornado in the house she is. Not a speck escapes her. She sees dirt, she destroys it. Tak tak! It would be her pleasure.

MAX
If you insist.

Max finally kicks off the dog.

MAX
Well... Bon nuit, Mr. Roussel.

ROUSSEL
A demain.

Max heads back to the house. He feels like he's being watched, so he stops, turns, and sure enough, Roussel is watching him like a police officer releasing a suspect he's sure is guilty.

ROUSSEL
Beware the septic tank, Monseur Max... Like many things in Provence, it can be capricious...

Roussel disappears like a ghost in the gloaming, as we...

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Max is asleep. Shafts of morning light break through the closed shutters. Max's Blackberry VIBRATES, waking him.

MAX
Hello?

GEMMA (O.S.)
We're-- Excuse me, you're in deep shit, Max.
INT. LAWTON BROTHERS - BOND TRADING BULLPEN - SAME

Gemma sits holding the Financial Times. The headline reads: LAWTON BOND TRADE UNDER INVESTIGATION.

GEMMA
The FSA has launched a formal investigation into your "unusual trading activity."

MAX
That's what you woke me for?

GEMMA
Max, the Commission is demanding you appear before them this afternoon to answer questions about the trade.

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - SAME

Max gets up and throws open the shutters. The blinding colors of Provence flood into the room.

MAX
Relax Gemma, I vetted the deal through legal already. The FSA's just making a show of it for PR's sake. I'll be back in a few hours ready to charm the pants off those septuagenarians. Now put Alf on--

KENNY (O.S.)
(jumps on)
I'm here, boss.

MAX
I want you to start loading up on futures in anticipation of today's U.S. payrolls announcement.

KENNY
Futures? Max, all our economists are predicting the numbers to come in well within expectations.

MAX
Kenny -- want to know why God made economists? To make the weathermen look good. Now both of you toddle back to work and make me some more money.
GEMMA
What else would one do with one’s life?

Max hangs up. On the window 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.

INT. KITCHEN - MINUTES LATER

Max scrounges through the cabinets and finds the motherload: an unopened can of coffee...

MAX
Praise Jesus.

The side door opens. Madame Roussel enters, clutching a vacuum cleaner and a plastic bucket.

MAX
Ah, good morning. Madame Roussel, I presume?

She ignores him and dumps her cleaning supplies on the floor, then snaps the can of coffee out of Max’s hands.

MADAME ROUSSEL
(shooing him out)
Attention dans le jardin! Je retrouve petit dejuner pour monsieur Max! (Go to the garden! I will bring Mr. Max his breakfast!)

Petrified, Max retreats from the kitchen...

EXT. GARDEN - LATER


MADAME ROUSSEL
The croissants -- they are still warm. But this fact is merely incidental, because breadmaking in France is not what it used to be.

Madame Roussel marches back into the house, muttering to herself in French. Max takes a sip of coffee. That’s great coffee. Dips the croissant in jam. Delicious. The moment is perfect. Magic! His phone RINGS:
MAX
Greetings, Charlie.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
Great news, old chap, we’ve already got a slew of inquiries, sight-unseen...

INT. LONDON - GEORGIAN TOWNHOUSE - SAME

Charlie stands in an empty townhouse. In the background, an ARISTOCRATIC COUPLE tours the dining room...

CHARLIE
Based on the interest so far, I daresay we could end up with three and change. Sterling.

MAX (O.S.)
Three million pounds! Charlie, that’s almost twice my yearly bonus!

CHARLIE
Turns out there are loads of New World winemakers desperate for a shot at some French terroir.

The couple notice a leak dripping from the ceiling.

CHARLIE
(to couple)
Holy water! The seller is a prominent member of the Church.

EXT. GARDEN - SAME

Max appraises the bastide in the bright morning light.

MAX
You might as well know it now, Charlie, the place is a little bit...I don’t know...shabby.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
We don’t call it shabby, Max, we call it...“the patina and faded charm of a bygone era.”

MAX
And the wine...it’s...I don’t know...
CHARLIE
...young and promising? Oh, on
the subject of plonk, one thing
everyone’s asking for is an
oenologue’s report.

MAX
What the hell is that?

CHARLIE
An oenologue’s a licensed wine
expert. They test the vines, take
soil samples, things of that sort.
Ask around, there must be a couple
not far from you.

MAX
(looks at watch)
Bugger, I have to go.

CHARLIE
Off to tour the vines?

MAX
No. Off to inherit.

INT. MAX’S CAR – MOVING – MORNING

Max is ripping down a local road, lined by long
irrigation ditches. He’s heading into town, singing
along to a U2 song, tapping away on his Blackberry...

EXT. ROAD – REVERSE ANGLE

Another car approaches from a right hand turn, assuming
right of way as all French do. It’s a vintage, 1960’s,
2CV Citroen.

INT. APPROACHING CITROEN – SAME

A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN, late-30’s, lights a cigarette and also
sings along to the same U2 song. She’s barely paying
attention to the road, until she notices Max’s car
speeding toward her...not giving in.

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN
Mon dieu! Tu es fou salaud! (My
God! You crazy bastard!)

The Beautiful Woman frantically swerves to avoid a
collision. Her car CAREENS off the road, and SLAMS
headfirst into an irrigation ditch.
INT. MAX'S CAR - MOVING - SAME

As...Max looks up from his Blackberry, unaware he just ran someone off the road, and continues into town...

EXT. ROADSIDE - SAME

The Woman is unhurt. She gets out to survey the damage, then discovers that the other driver hasn't stopped. She charges onto the road, screaming after him--

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN
Va te faire encluer! (Get fucked up the ass!)

As Max gets further away, she can only make out his car's shape and color: lime-green. She smells smoke. Her cigarette has lit the front passenger seat on fire...!

EXT. LOURMARIN - RUE HENRI SAVORNIN - MORNING

Max walks down the main street in town... Despite the tourist season, the place is a little gem. He passes a couple of café's, a lone tabac, and the mairie (town hall), whose entrance is adorned by a bright French flag. We sense there are memories with every step Max takes.

INT. MAITRE AUZET'S OFFICE - MORNING

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

SECRETAIRE
Ms. Auzet will be with you shortly, Mr. Skinner.

But as Max sits down, Auzet's door opens, and three well-dressed JAPANESE MEN emerge. Out of sight, Auzet's voice bids them goodbye in fluent Japanese.

AUZET (O.S.)
Minna-san, doumo arigatou gozaimashita.

They all bow and quickly shuffle out into the street.

AUZET
Mr. Skinner?
Max watches MAITRE NATHALIE AUZET emerge from her office. He didn’t expect this alluring woman standing across from him. Auzet’s in her 30’s, slim, with porcelain skin and henna-red hair styled in a Louise Brooks bobcut.

INT. AUZET’S OFFICE – A BIT LATER

A modest office, overflowing with files and law books. Auzet WHACKS the contract with her NOTARY STAMP, nearly cutting Max’s fingers off. All business, she hands him a copy of the deed.

AUZET

Now then...unfortunately, matters of succession are never completely without a few loose ends...

(gets serious)

Mr. Skinner, in most wine growing regions in France there is an arrangement known as metayage. The terms are simple: the vigneron makes the wine and the estate owner pays for the upkeep. The proceeds of the wine are then shared fifty-fifty. Your Uncle Henry participated in this arrangement with Roussel for over thirty years. But now that your Uncle has passed away, Roussel is understandably anxious as to your intentions.

MAX

My intentions are simple: I don’t plan on becoming a vinter.

AUZET

A wise decision. In my experience, outsiders primarily enjoy Provence as a weekend retreat or summer refuge. Best to leave winemaking and it’s fickleness to the locals.

MAX

I don’t think you quite understood me, Ms. Auzet. You see, Le Griffon is for sale.

AUZET

(astounded)

This is something you discussed with your Uncle?
MAX
Actually, no, we hadn’t spoken in years. Nonetheless, my decision is made.

AUZET
And what of Mr. Roussel? If not dealt with properly, he could make things difficult for you.

MAX
Ms. Auzet, I just hoodwinked the entire London Bond market -- I think I can handle a peasant from the South of France.
(shifting)
Now on an entirely different note, I wonder if you might help me find an...oenologue? Someone to tell me what condition my vines are in.

AUZET
(thinking about it)
I have an old friend...who teaches at the University, in Bordeaux. Very reputable. If I can pry him away from his classroom, he would be perfect.

MAX
Good, then, I’ll leave the details to you...
(stands)
Now if there’s nothing else, I’ve got a plane to catch...

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

MAX
Thanks again, Ms. Auzet. Under normal circumstances I’d have asked you to lunch.

AUZET
Under normal circumstances I’d have said no.

INT. MAX’S CAR - MOVING

Max pulls out of town...en route to the airport. He’s on his Blackberry with Charlie, effusive.
MAX
Charlie -- it's official: I'm part
of the landed gentry!

CHARLIE (O.S.)
How 'bout the oenologue?

MAX
Happening.

CHARLIE
Do us one last favor, yeah? Grab
a few snapshots of the place.

MAX
Sorry, mate, no time -- got a
plane to catch.

CHARLIE
A few sexed-up photos could
seriously pump up the sale price.

Max looks at his watch; screeches to a stop. U-turns.

EXT. LE GRIFFON - DAY
Max walks the estate, taking photos with a tiny digital
camera. Wide shots. Close shots. Shots of the colorful
garden; the tennis court; the murky bassin. Every photo
a reminder of what he's giving up.

EXT. VINEYARD - DAY
Max searches for the "money shot" of the vineyard. He
tugs a grape from one of the vines and pops it into his
mouth. Max is starting to lose himself in this world...
until his Blackberry VIBRATES:

GEMMA (O.S.)
Max, eleven here, twelve there--

MAX
Just getting into my car now,
Gemma. See you in a few.

He hangs up. Then, quickly lines up his camera for a
shot. But just as he presses the button, a face enters
the frame...FLASH! Max has taken a distorted close shot
of...Roussel, who looks incredibly angry; there's drool
dripping from the gap of his two missing teeth.

MAX
Oh shit--
ROUSSEL
You would cast away my vines...!

MAX
Ms. Auzet ratted me out--?

ROUSSEL
...to a mere stranger!?

MAX
(cool)
They’re not your vines, Roussel.
They’re my vines.

ROUSSEL
I see. Is it you who has treated
these vines as if they were your
own famille? Is it you who trims
them every year like un sculptor
shaping his clay.

Roussel breaks down into French expletives, ending on...

ROUSSEL
...mon beau vin! (my beautiful
wine!)

Max’s Blackberry starts vibrating. He ignores it.

MAX
Roussel, you were loyal to my
Uncle, and I intend to repay that.
When the house closes, I’ll send
you a check that’ll keep you and
the missus in foie gras for life.

ROUSSEL
(disdainful)
I do not want your handouts! If
he is lucky, a winemaker has but
thirty or forty chances to make
his wine. Only thirty or forty
harvests! And then, he departs,
leaving all his labor bottled up,
shrouded in darkness, waiting
patiently for it’s moment to come.
You would dare take away my last
few chances at immortality?!

MAX
I’m afraid so.

Roussel lets out a PRIMAL SCREAM and storms off. Tati
BARKS twice, pisses on Max’s shoes, and follows. Max’s
Blackberry VIBRATES again. He answers:
MAX

What!

GEMMA (O.S.)
Get in the fucking car and drive!

EXT. POOL - MINUTES LATER

But Max is now standing near the empty pool, because... the best shot of the bastide awaits him... Max sets his Blackberry on the ground, and walks to the end of the diving board, attempting to get the right angle. He points his camera at the house...FLASH...and CRACK! -- the diving board SNAPS in two.

MAX

AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

Max plummets into the pool and lands on a thin cushion of mud and leaves! OOFF!

MAX

F**k that hurt!

Max struggles to sit up. He looks around for a ladder to climb out. Guess what? There's no ladder. Even worse, the pool has no shallow end...it's simply a concrete pit.

MAX

What the--?
(then)
Phone.

He searches his pockets, but, shit, the phone's up above.

MAX

Oh perfect!
(then, feeling really ridiculous)
MADAME ROUSSEL?! MADAME ROUSSEL?!

But there's only the scratchy serenade of the cigales.

LATER

Max is pacing, frustrated. Then, he hears a familiar sound. ZZZZT. Max looks up. It's his Blackberry. It's skating along the top of the pool, each vibrating ring bringing it closer to the edge...

MAX

Oh please, baby. Come to papa.
INT. LONDON - TOWN CAR - MOVING - SAME

Raining like crazy. Gemma sits in back, circling Heathrow Airport. She’s on her phone...ring...ring...

GEMMA
Where are you, you fucking tosser?

INT. POOL - SAME

Max waits, hands outstretched, hoping the phone will drop into the pool. ZZZT. Closer. ZZZT. On the edge now...

MAX
Oh please God, yes.

...and then...silence. The VIBRATING has stopped. Max has had it! He throws a spastic-fit -- kicking and screaming wildly. He picks up the broken diving board and batterams it against the side wall...then slithers onto the curved bottom of the pool, a defeated man.

EXT. ROAD - AFTERNOON

The Beautiful Woman who Max ran off the road is coming back from town...on an old fashioned bicycle with red tires. The Woman’s left arm is in a makeshift sling: a colorful Hermes scarf. Her summer skirt flutters as she angrily pedals along the road...cursing her misfortune. But then...she skids to a stop. Something, it seems, has caught her attention--

WOMAN’S POV - LE GRIFFON - DRIVEWAY

There’s the offending vehicle: Max’s lime-green Smart Car, parked innocently in front of the house.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - SECONDS LATER

The Woman coasts into the driveway, climbs off her bike, looking for a fight.

MAX (O.S.)
...they’re rounding the far turn...heading for home...and down the stretch...Gates is leading by a nose...!
She HEARS Max's VOICE...and follows it...around the side of the house...through the garden...and past the tennis court...

EXT. POOL - SAME

Max is sitting on the ground, racing ants on a makeshift track he's sketched into the mud...

MAX
...Branson and Buffet are bobbing...with Soros in third, closing the gap with every stride...Looks like a photo finish, folks!

Then, interrupting him from above:

WOMAN'S VOICE
Excusez-moi. Est-ce que c'est votre voiture? (Is that your car?)

Max looks up...and takes in this absolute vision beauty. He's immediately under her spell; unable to talk.

FANNY
Non parlez-français? Parlez-vous anglais?

Max stands and tries to wipe himself off, but he merely smears himself with more mud.

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN
Is that your car?

MAX
(embarrassed)
Hired! My Rover back in London could eat it in one bite.

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

FANNY
Can you swim?

MAX
(perplexed)
Excuse me?

FANNY
Can you swim?
MAX

Of course I can swim.

Fanny disappears.

MAX

Hey! HEY!

And then...after a moment, a TORRENTIAL FLOOD of WATER EXPLODES into the pool. It knocks Max on his ass, sliding him on the muddy floor.

MAX

WHAT THE HELL--!

Fanny has turned on the valve pump. Six spouts on the inside of the pool blast water in every direction. Max fights his way out of the deluge.

MAX

ARE YOU MAD! HELP ME OUT OF HERE!

But Fanny is not answering. She's gone.

EXT. POOL - LATER

The pool is half-filled now. But it's empty. Where's Max? Did he manage to escape? Or drown? Suddenly, Max ERUPTS from beneath the water like a torpedo...flying into the air, trying to grab the ledge of the pool--

MAX

BANZAI!!

His fingertips just catch the edge. He's holding on for life. But he loses his grip...and plunges back into the pool. Undeterred, he tries again...just as Madame Roussel shuffles past, on her way home. She's puzzled as Max BURSTS out of the water, and this time misses altogether. Max doesn't see her...and she walks off...

EXT. POOL - SUNSET

The sky is a lurid bonfire of gold and pink. The pool is three-quarters filled. Max is on his back now, floating on the water. His mood has shifted. He stares into the pinwheel of colors in the sky. It's a Zen moment; the first time he's stopped to see the beauty of Provence...
EXT. POOL - NIGHT

The water is finally high enough for Max to escape. He heaves himself out and immediately grabs his Blackberry.

INT. BASTIDE - STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Max climbs the steps, stripping off his wet clothes, and talking to Gemma:

MAX
Suspended!? For what?

INT. LONDON - LAWTON BROTHERS - SAME

GEMMA
What do you think? Failure to appear before the Commission.

MAX (O.S.)
Oh Jesus!

GEMMA
As of now, you’re temporarily banned from trading -- and they’re going to fine you 10,000 pounds a day until you do decide to appear.

MAX
Book me on the earliest flight out tomorrow morning. I want a car waiting to take me right over to the FSA so I can square things up.

GEMMA
Anything else?

MAX
Yeah. Connect me to the local police station. I need to report an attempted murder...

INT. LOURMARIN POLICE DEPARTMENT - SAME

A tiny, one-room station. The town’s extremely young GENDARME, 21, with a well-coiffed mullet, watches a dubbed version of “The Godfather.” The phone begins to RING. But the cop couldn’t care less. Finally, an answering machine picks up. Yes, an answering machine!
MAX'S VOICE
(dripping with irony)
Hi, it's Osama Bin Laden calling.
I suddenly felt the urge to turn
myself in, but I guess now's not
the best time for you guys. Okay,
I'll try back after Ramadan...
Asalam Alakom.

Beep. The Gendarme is completely unfazed.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. LE GRIFFON - MORNING - ESTABLISHING

It's barely eight, but the sun is already beating down on
the estate. Madame Roussel sweeps the courtyard.

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

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! MADAME ROUSSEL!
MADAME ROUSSEL!

He leaps onto the bed like a little boy. Madame Roussel
bursts in and sees the scorpions.

MADAME ROUSSEL
Lavande!? Lavande!?

MAX
In English, Madame Roussel! In
English!

Madame Roussel takes her broom and ferociously pounds the
scorpions, squashing them. When they're all dead, she
walks to the garbage can, fishes out the plastic dish of
moldy lavender, and places it back on the window sill.

MADAME ROUSSEL
Lavande.

EXT. LE GRIFFON - DRIVEWAY - LATER

Max exits the bastide...finally ready to go home. (With
no other choice, he's had to put on some of Uncle Henry's
clothes, which fit him well enough, but are a bit dated.)
Max heads to his car...then abruptly stops--
MAX

Bollocks!

CLOSE SHOT - MAX'S CAR TIRES

They are all slashed...flat.

MAX (O.S.)

It's not just destruction of property!

CAMERA PULLS BACK TO REVEAL...

EXT. DRIVEWAY - LATER

Max is shouting at the Gendarme, trying to explain with elaborate mime about the woman who tried to drown him. Max has recruited Madame Roussel to help translate. She speaks in French to the cop, who nods and furiously scribbles notes...

MAX

We're talking about an attempted drowning too...!

Meanwhile, in the background, a languid MECHANIC, with a lit cigarette glued to the edge of his lip, attempts to jack up Max's car up so he can change the tires... But every time he pushes down on the jack, it burrows deeper and deeper into the driveway. This could take days...

Finally, the Gendarme nods. Snaps his notebook shut.

MAX

(to Madame Roussel)

You're sure he got it all?

MADAME ROUSSEL

Oui. The recipe to my boeuf bourguignon is quite complex. But Pierre is a quick study.

Irate, Max snaps the notebook from the Gendarme.

MAX

(reading)

6 carrots... 40 grams of butter...

Suddenly, everyone's engulfed in a plume of orange mist.
ANGLE ON - EDGE OF VINEYARD

Roussel is driving his tractor nearby, obliviously spraying the vines.

MAX
What the hell is he doing!?

BACK TO SCENE

Max is coughing and cursing... When the dust finally clears, someone else has appeared in the driveway: a pretty BLONDE GIRL, 21, with a backpack. The Blonde Girl is 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.)

All point to Max. She turns to him and 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
That’s me.

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

MAX
(sexual innuendo)
Funny, I was just going to say the same thing about you.
CHRISTIE
I meant to be my Dad. Henry
Skinner's my father.

Clearly off of Max's doubt and mistrust, Christie fishes
into her knapsack, unearths 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.

MAX
That's your Mum?

CHRISTIE
In all her Flashdance-glory.

Madame Roussel studies Christie's face.

MADAME ROUSSEL
She has Henri's nose!

CHRISTIE
So...? Where's my Dad...?

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S STUDY - MINUTES LATER

Christie stands holding the framed photo of Henry and
Max, appropriately bewildered given the circumstances.
Max has obviously informed her that Henry is dead.

CHRISTIE
Unbelievable. The irony's
catastrophic -- like a de
Maupassant ending.

MAX
You said you hail from California?

CHRISTIE
(wandering the study)
Napa Valley. Mom's a tour guide
at a local vineyard. That's where
she met Henry. He took the tour
one day and charmed her pants off.
Literally. By the time she
realized she was pregnant, Henry
was long gone.

(MORE)
CHRISTIE (CONT'D)
She figured it was best not to burden a free-spirit like Henry with a kid...so she never told him, then waited until last week -- my 21st birthday -- to come clean with me.

MAX
(skeptical)
No offense Christie, but my Uncle put the Kama in Sutra -- which is a roundabout way of saying he was a womanizer. And by the looks of this photo, your old lady had some fun in her salad days.

CHRISTIE
As the executor of his estate, you could request a DNA test, couldn’t you?

MAX
You expect me to exhume my Uncle’s body...all because some California blonde shows up claiming to be his love child?

CHRISTIE
I don’t expect you to do anything, Max. I do, however, ask for a modicum of sensitivity, given the circumstances. And, frankly, if your attitude so far is any indication of the Skinner temperament, I have to say, maybe I’m lucky I never met my old man.

Max is melting down...feeling what he truly is -- a shit.

MAX
Look, I--
(looks at his watch)
Oh hell-- You want a drink?

CHRISTIE
You were supposed to ask that first.

EXT. BACK TERRACE - A BIT LATER

A wonderful view of the estate spreads out below them. She smokes; he keeps glancing at his watch.
CHRISTIE
Kinda freaky, actually. Dad
shackin’ up in France I mean.

MAX
Why’s that?

CHRISTIE
’Cuz I came out of the womb a
Francophile. Not the typical,
beret-wearing, Moveable Feast-
kind, mind you. I’m talkin’ Serge
Gainsbourg LP’s, Cocteau film
festivals -- even cut my hair into
a Jean Seberg pixie when I was
fifteen.

MAX
Personally, I never understood the
obsession with all things French.
Lazy, arrogant lot if you ask me.
Even Uncle Henry was mystified by
the cult of Gallic life.

CHRISTIE
Why’d he settle down here, then?

MAX
He 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’s Blackberry vibrates.

MAX
Hello?

VOICE (O.S.)
Congratulations on your
suspension, Skinner. Couldn’t
have happened to a dodgier bloke.

MAX
That you Amis? I’ve been meaning
to call and thank you...

INT. DEUTSCHE BANK - BOND TRADING FLOOR - SAME
Amis sits behind his desk, his headset on.
MAX (O.S.)
It was so generous of you to contribute to my Aston-Martin fund. I'm afraid your donation isn't tax-deductible, though.

AMIS
You've crossed the line one too many times, Skinner. And now that you're temporarily frozen out of the game, it's open season on your assets. One way or another, I'm gonna get my money back...and turn your bond department into the financial equivalent of Fallouja. Cheerio.

INT. TERRACE - SAME

Max hangs up, slightly tweaked. He turns to Christie--

MAX
Sorry, but I really do have a plane to catch.

CHRISTIE
You a money guy?

MAX
How could you tell?

CHRISTIE
How could you not?

She stands, sensing there's nothing left for her here.

CHRISTIE
I booked a youth hostel in town...just in case the old man was schitzo. You mind dropping me?

MAX
Sure... Come on.

EXT. LOURMARIN - RUE HENRI SAVORNIN - LATER

Max's car pulls up in front of the youth hostel.

INT. MAX'S CAR - IDLING

Max hands Christie his business card.
MAX
Give me a call if you make it to
London.
(lecherous)
We’ll have a drink.

CHRISTIE
I’m twenty-one Max, I don’t do
business cards...
(she hands the card
back)
...and I don’t do my cousins.

She gets out...just as...KNOCK, KNOCK. Maitre Auzet is
rapping on his car window. Max smiles cockily...lowers
the window.

MAX
Changed your mind about lunch, eh?

INT. MAITRE AZET’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 young woman would
be entitled to sole ownership of
the estate.

INT. MAITRE AZET’S OFFICE - WAITING AREA - SAME

Christie sits in the lobby, reading a magazine. She can
hear Max’s RAISED VOICE in the other room. Three SAUDIS
enter the office and take the seats next to her. She
gets uncomfortable as the men lick her with their eyes.

CHRISTIE
Not for sale.

INT. MAITRE AZET’S OFFICE - SAME

MAX
Has it occurred to you that she
could be an imposter?
Auzet
That is precisely why I must submit this photo to a judge for immediate review. If he deems it sufficient evidence of her affiliation, he will order the disinterment of your Uncle’s body and a DNA test to establish paternity.

Max
Disinterment? Ugh, that’s horrible.

Auzet
If, however, he concludes her story is suspect, then the house will be yours, free and clear... In the meantime, I would advise you not to leave.

Max
Come again?

Auzet
To safeguard your position, it is vital that you maintain a physical presence on the property while we wait for the judge’s decision.

Max
Sorry, but I’ve already reached my lavender quota for the year.

Auzet
Your absence could be interpreted as giving up one’s legal claims. And of course, I am obliged to advise Ms. Roberts of her right to inhabit the residence too.

Max
No! She cannot stay in my house! I won’t allow it!

Auzet
Take my advice, Mr. Skinner: it would behoove you to treat Ms. Roberts with a minimum level of respect. French law has a habite of favoring the underdog. Don’t make her one.

Auzet’s Secretaire KNOCKS and enters. She motions to the three Saudis who have arrived.
AUZET

Ah, bon.

(standing up)
Mr. Skinner, with luck, we’ll have a ruling in a few days...

As Auzet leads Max to her door--

MAX

By the way, where’s my oenologue?

AUZET

Ah yes, I spoke to my friend, Jean-Marie Brunier. He has a very busy schedule, but he is trying to make some time for you this weekend. I will let you know shortly. Good day, Mr. Skinner.

She opens the door for him.

THE WAITING AREA

AUZET

(to Saudis; in fluent Arabic)
Gentleman, I won’t be more than a few minutes.

(to Christie)
Ms. Roberts? Please come in...

Max stamps past Christie, then out of the office, SLAMMING the door behind him.

INT. MAX’S CAR – MOVING

Max talks on his Blackberry, driving back to the bastide.

GEMMA (O.S.)

A few days! You’re not fucking serious?!

MAX

Don’t get your knickers in a twist, Gemma.

GEMMA

And what do you plan on telling Sir Lawton: that you’re going on holiday while the entire Square Mile is gunning for your arse!
INT. LONDON - LAWTON BROTHERS - SAME

MAX (O.S.)
Sir Lawton already knows I’m down here settling my Uncle’s estate; and the fines won’t register until the end of the quarter. In the meantime, I’m getting all the real-time quotes on my Blackberry; I’ll just have Kenny make all my trades until I can get out of here.

GEMMA
On the subject of your protégé, I think you should know he’s getting quite cozy in your seat.

ANGLE ON - KENNY
Who’s sitting behind Max’s desk, sweet-talking a girl...

KENNY
...sorry, luv, last night was chirpy, but I’m off to an ashram in India...

INT. MAX’S CAR - MOVING

MAX
If he wasn’t a backstabbing runt, I would have never hired him.

Something up ahead catches Max’s attention...

MAX’S POV - THROUGH WINDSHIELD
The local Citroen auto shop. He sees the Beautiful Woman standing in the garage, screaming at a MECHANIC’s legs, which stick out from underneath her car.

MAX
Gotta go, Gemma.

He hangs up on her.
EXT. SERVICE STATION - SAME

Max pulls into the station. Gets out of his car and confronts the Woman, who’s ranting to the Mechanic in French. There’s some shitty French rap music coming from a radio.

MAX
Remember me? Aquaman.

WOMAN
(amused)
Ah, so you can swim... You will be happy to know I read the obituaries this morning... just in case.

MAX
Your concern for my welfare is touching.

WOMAN
Monsieur, the suffering you endured is incomparable to the state of my arm...
(points to her sling)
...and my precious Citroen, thanks to your incompetent driving. Are you in the habit of running people off the road and leaving the scene of a crime?

She points to her Citroen. Pieces of engine are strewn all over the garage floor...

WOMAN
Look at the passenger seat...
(it’s charred beyond recognition)
To find a vintage replacement will be impossible!

She climbs onto her bike. Max is nearly dying from her whole allure... even her fury is sexy.

MAX
Listen, I swear I don’t have a clue what you’re talking about, but in the spirit of a unified EU, I’m willing to make good.

He reaches into his wallet. Pulls out a wad of cash.
WOMAN  
(condescending)  
It is clear, Monsieur, that you 
learned nothing from your Uncle.

She pedals off.

MAX  
Wait! You knew my Uncle?!

But she doesn’t answer. Max watches her derrière 
disappear down the tree-lined road. He kicks the 
Mechanic’s foot.

MAX  
Pardon! Who is that lady?

The Mechanic rolls out, covered in grease. He’s the same 
Mechanic who was changing Max’s tires.

MECHANIC  
That is Fanny Chenal.

MAX  
(so familiar)  
Fanny...Fanny...?  
(awestruck)  
Hey, I think I remember her... Did 
she grow up here, in Lourmarin?

MECHANIC  
I believe so, yes.  
(switches off his  
radio; warning)  
Monseur...recall what Marcel  
Proust said: “Leave pretty women  
to men without imagination.”

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

INT. BASTIDE - THIRD FLOOR - AFTERNOON

Max abruptly shuffles Christie into an attic guest room--

MAX  
(curt)  
This is your room.

CHRISTIE  
How lovely...the bastard child  
gets the mothballed garret.
MAX
Ground rules: don’t get near the study...

CHRISTIE
Max, you’re acting like I came here to steal the house from you.

MAX
...don’t poke around the wine cellar...

CHRISTIE
All I want to know is if Henry was my Dad. That’s all.

MAX
...and under no circumstances are you to socialize with the Roussels. Capisce?

Max heads for the stairs.

CHRISTIE
Hey Max.

(he stops)
You’re my cousin, not my father. Capisce?

She slams her door in his face.

EXT. GARDEN – DUSK

Max lies on a hammock, his laptop on his stomach, tapping away, talking to Kenny:

KENNY (O.S.)
Brilliant move on those futures, boss. We cleared close to four million pounds today!

INT. LONDON – LAWTON BROTHERS – SAME

Kenny sits at Max’s work-station.

MAX (O.S.)
We didn’t clear dick, Alf. I did. Now get your skinny ass out of my seat, and focus on the problem at hand: Amis.

Kenny jumps up.
KENNY
Of course, Max-- Sorry.

MAX
With me stuck here in purgatory, you’ve got to be my eyes and ears. This is your chance to shine. Can I count on you?

KENNY
24-hours a day, boss.

MAX
That’s not good enough, Kenny. But it’ll have to do.

EXT. GARDEN - SAME

Max hangs up. Closes his laptop, laces his fingers behind his head. Inhales the crisp evening air. He could seriously get used to this...

MADAME ROUSSEL
MONSEUR MAX!
(Max is startled)
Diner!

INT. DINING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

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

MAX
Madame Roussel, she’s my cousin.
(backpedaling)
Maybe.

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

Madame Roussel exits. A wonderful meal awaits Max: fromage, charcuterie, and foie gras. There is, however, one ugly sight: an opened bottle of Le Griffon 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 a dozen unlabeled bottles of red. In grease pencil, scribbled on the underside of each bottle, is written:
2000

Intrigued, he grabs one.

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 FLASHBACK. MAX CLIMBS UP THE LADDER, 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 FLICKERING, 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
Fervere.

UNCLE HENRY
(confused)
Are you speaking in tongues, boy?

YOUNG MAX
(confident)
Fervere. 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 Russell guy explained it to me.
UNCLE HENRY
Well done. Proves the adage that wisdom can be found in the most unlikely places. Someday, Max, you should take it upon yourself to observe Mr. Roussel in his native habitat. To watch him 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.

UNCLE HENRY
In that case, Max, my only advice is this: never draw to an inside straight, and never try to outbet a Turk.

Max chuckles, as the reverie fades away.

INT. DINING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Max tastes a glass of the 2000 wine. Wow. That's unbelievable stuff... Christie enters. She's changed into comfy clothes -- boxer shorts, tank top, slippers. She grabs a plate and helps herself to a selection of the food. Max ignores her. She pours herself a taster of Le Griffon wine. Sips it. Makes a face. Yuck. She then proceeds to pour a taster of the unmarked wine. She swirls, sniffs, sips, trills, and swallows.

CHRISTIE
Mmmm. Formidable.

She studies the bottle.

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

MAX
I guess.

CHRISTIE
Why's it in a Bordeaux-shaped bottle, then?
She grabs the 2000 bottle and holds it up next to the Le Griffon bottle. They are shaped differently.

CHRISTIE
(more swirling)
It has a darker robe than the usual Bordeaux. An oxblood ruby.
Velvet, rather than wool...
(sips again)
It’s a brave wine...one with great honesty.

Max pauses. Sounds a little like Uncle Henry.

MAX
Okay Roberta Parker -- you’ve got your dinner, now bugger off.

CHRISTIE
It’s tragic. To meet a new cousin, only to realize he’s...
a Philistine.

Christie shuffles off. Max can’t help himself; his eyes follow her ass. He grabs his Blackberry; dials a number.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
Hello?

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

CHARLIE
Only if she’s ugly.

INT. CHRISTIE’S BEDROOM – MINUTES LATER

Christie stuffs her face with food as she unpacks. She listens to the radio. Naturally, they are playing “Moi, Lolita.” She notices a plastic dish filled with moldy lavender on her window sill. Gross. She tosses the dish into the trash.

EXT. BASTIDE – NIGHT

The moon hangs in the sky, a perfect, glowing, orb. Only two lights are on inside the bastide: the dining room and Christie’s bedroom.
REVERSE SHOT - THE ROUSSEL'S COTTAGE - TERRACE

Roussel sits on a chair on his terrace, his wife on his lap. They both stare at the house from afar...

MADAME ROUSSEL

Perhaps we have been saved, Clo-Clo?

Roussel listens patiently to the breeze.

ROUSSEL

The vines say there is still much
to be worried about...

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. LE GRIFFON - NEXT MORNING

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

CHRISTIE (O.S)

Omigod! Help! Scorpions!

Madame Roussel charges into the house with her broom...

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S STUDY - LATER

Max sits at his Uncle's desk, carefully examining Le Griffon's accounting records, while uploading his photographs of the estate onto his laptop. Behind him, the Victrola spins an old Edith Piaf album. Madame Roussel is on her knees, scouring the floor.

MAX

(frustrated)

How in bloody hell did this place
stay afloat for so long...?

The song ends...and the next song is "C'est l'amour."
Upon hearing it, Madame Roussel stops working, and lowers her head. From behind, it looks like the song is evoking an intense, emotional response.

MAX

Do you ever think about my Uncle,
Madame Roussel?
MADAME ROUSSEL

No.

(beat)
He was filthy. He treated this
place like it was un bordel. An
old man living alone. One can
always tell.

She returns to scouring. Then stops.

MADAME ROUSSEL

But he was an excellent dancer.

Max smiles. Madame Roussel rises...accosts him.

MADAME ROUSSEL

Mr. Max? My husband would very much
like to resolve this ugly conflit...
You will come to our home for dinner
this evening?

MAX

Oh, I don’t know if that’s such a
keen idea, Madame Roussel--

MADAME ROUSSEL

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

Madame Roussel exits in a frantic rush.

EXT. VINEYARD - SAME

Christie sips coffee and wanders the vineyard. She
reaches a wall of trees that seem to mark the end of the
property-line. But notices a small, arch-like
opening...so she walks through, and finds herself beneath
a canopy of dense trees. It’s dark here, and the air is
considerably cooler. A few hundred feet down the way,
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 pebbles. It’s otherworldly. Before she can
survey things, though, she suddenly hears a GGGRRRROWL.
It’s Tati (who’s the shade of green today).

ROUSSEL (O.S.)

Tati, non!

Roussel appears, and the dog sits.
CHRISTIE
Bon jour, Monseur. Je suis--

ROUSSEL
I know who you are, Ms. Roberts.
I am Claude Roussel, the vigneron.

CHRISTIE
You knew my father?

ROUSSEL
For thirty-three years I toiled
beneath Henri's gaze...to make his
vineyard the pride of Provence.

CHRISTIE
(surveying hectare)
It appears you've succeeded...
Indeed, last night I had the
opportunity to sample your 2000
vintage. It was lovely...

ROUSSEL
Merci.

CHRISTIE
...though I couldn't help but
wonder: why wasn't it labeled?
All it had was the vintage year
scribbled on the punt.

Roussel casually steps in front of her, attempting to
block her view of the hectare. Christie notices.

ROUSSEL
Regrettfully, Mademoiselle, the
wine you are referring to was not
made here, but by an old friend of
mine in Bordeaux. He sends me a
few cases every year. They are
unlabeled and without capsules to
avoid taxes.

CHRISTIE
Well that explains the shape of
the bottle.

ROUSSEL
I see you are no stranger to
viticulture.

CHRISTIE
Oh, I'm a wine brat. Spent my
summers working at a Santa Rosa
vineyard.
ROUSSEL
Ach! They do not make wine in California, they make...how do you say...Hawaiian Punch.

CHRISTIE
The Mondavi’s might argue that point.

ROUSSEL
Perhaps Monseur’s daughter could be persuaded to the Gallic way by a personal tour of a French cave?

CHRISTIE
I’d be delighted.

ROUSSEL
I warn you: there are no computers or bowling alleys down there...just the tradition of two thousand years...

Roussel takes Christie’s arm and gently guides her back through the trees...away from the hectare. She throws a backwards glance: why does she get the feeling Roussel is hiding something?

EXT. LOURMARIN - RUE HENRI SAVORNIN - MORNING

It’s market day. Half the main street has been shut off for vendors selling their wares. Max is enchanted by the ambiance as he samples nuts, olives, etc... Suddenly, Max catches sight of Fanny’s fanny...it’s unmistakable.

MAX
Fanny!

He catches up to her. She looks at him quizzically.

FANNY
You are here with a new car seat, I hope?

MAX
Do you remember me?

FANNY
Of course. The idiot in the pool.

MAX
No. I’m Max Skinner.

(nothing)

Think back. It was summer.

(MORE)
MAX (CONT'D)

Years ago...
(still nothing)
You couldn't have been more than
twelve. You and your Mom came to
visit Le Griffon and...

Max trails off, seeing that Fanny has no recall. He
covers his disappointment, but Fanny senses it.

FANNY
I apologize, Monseur, because
there is nothing worse than not
being able to share a memory.

MAX
Especially one so...vivid.

FANNY
Was I temperamental? I hope I
was. Stendahl said a woman's
power lies in the degree of
unhappiness with which she can
punish her lover.

Max watches a dog wander behind a counter and help itself
to a broiled chicken thigh--

MAX
This place is unbelievable. I
mean, there are dogs everywhere,
people are smoking, and the guys
behind the stalls aren't even
wearing plastic gloves. The
hygiene police in America would
have a field day here.

Fanny smiles. Max is hard not to like.

MAX
Look, seeing that we have an
established history -- albeit a
history you have no recollection
of -- the least you could do is
let me take you to watch a sunset.
I hear they make good ones down
here. Dreadful showers.
Wonderful sunsets.

FANNY
You may come to my place tonight,
apres dinner.

She points. They are now standing across from--
EXT. CHEZ FANNY - SAME

A cute little cafe. Max is impressed. A businesswoman.

MAX
If I order the most expensive bottle of wine, will you forgive me for ruining your car seat?

FANNY
No. But I will forgive you for looking up my dress.

Max watches this wonderful woman disappear into her cafe.

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Django Reinhart’s “Time on My Hands” spills from the house. Hair wet, towel wrapped around his waist, Max digs through Uncle Henry’s clothes closet.

EXT. VINEYARD - EVENING

Dressed in a seersucker (with 70’s-era flared pants), Max ambles through the vines, en route to Roussel’s cottage. His Blackberry vibrates:

MAX
What’s happening, Charlie?

CHARLIE (O.S.)
The photos worked like a charm, mate. We’re now into multiple bids...with an old South African wine family in lead position. Things are getting critical — 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. ROUSSEL’S COTTAGE - EVENING

For a peasant, Roussel 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 -- trellises, gates, curlicued railings -- to open a showroom.
Max KNOCKS. Roussel answers, dressed in black trousers, a crisp white shirt, and a big, friendly, smile.

ROUSSEL
Monseur Max! Bienvenu! We must have an apero -- no, no -- first I will show you my little property. Allez, allez...

Max is suspicious. Why is he being so nice?

EXT. BACK OF HOUSE - KENNEL - SECONDS LATER

Roussel and Max are greeted by a chorus of SQUEALS and BARKS coming from a pack of caged, mud-colored hounds.

ROUSSEL
Chiens de chasse. They are impatient for September, when the season starts. Nothing eludes them -- boar, snipe, partridge--

MAX
Mailmen?

EXT. SIDE OF HOUSE - VEGETABLE GARDEN - SECONDS LATER

Roussel and Max stroll through row-upon-row of ripened vegetables.

MAX
Roussel -- what can you tell me about Fanny Chenal?

ROUSSEL
Ah. The most beautiful woman in all of Provence. And, sadly, the worst cook.

MAX
But she owns a restaurant.

ROUSSEL
God grants his gifts sparingly, I'm afraid.

MAX
No ex-husband...or a boyfriend?

ROUSSEL
Once there was a racecar driver, from Italy.

(MORE)
ROUSSEL (CONT'D)
He treated her very poorly, though. People say she is now a lesbienne...others, frigid.

MAX
Any idea if my Uncle was, you know, with her?

ROUSSEL
Of course I cannot be certain, but one must assume...

MAX
...assume yes, or assume no?

Roussel shrugs.

ROUSSEL
Allez...it is time for pastis...

EXT. TERRACE - EVENING
Roussel leads Max out to an enormous 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 slim black dress kissing her body.

ROUSSEL
I hope you don't mind, I took the liberty of inviting your house guest to join us. A lovely girl, who no doubt bears her father's nose.

MAX
(to Christie; sotto)
I see you and your septum have managed to ingratiate yourselves with the help.

CHRISTIE
Some people know what the word hospitality means.

PAPA ROUSSEL, 80's, wanders up. He's got a thick head of hair, which is dyed blacker than charcoal. He's also got a serious case of the shakes.

ROUSSEL
My father-in-law, Gerard.

MAX
Enchante.
Papa sweeps back his hair and shakes Max's hand, leaving a clump of polish on Max's palm.

**ROUSSEL**
(whispering)
Some in town accused Papa of being a collaborator, but he claims he never turned in his parents...just his wife.

Just then -- Madame Roussel arrives on the terrace, pushing a moveable feast: a trolley laden with slices of fat-dappled sausage, wedges of pizza, tapenade on squares of toasted bread, slivers of raw vegetables with an anchoiade dip, black and green olives, radishes with white butter, and a thick earthenware terrine of thrush pate, with the bird's beak protruding from the dark meat.

**MAX**
Ooh la lard.

**ROUSSEL**
Just a few small mouthfuls...to encourage the appetite.

**CHRISTIE**
(stunned)
This isn't dinner?

Christie inspects the pate, zeroing in on the bird's beak, revolted. Max mockingly makes birdsounds in her ear... Chirp, chirp.

**INT. DINING ROOM - LATER**

Laughably overdecorated. The walls are all covered with photos, medieval armor, polished shotguns, and stuffed wolves. Everyone is now buzzed from pastis. Roussel makes a tour of the table, pouring everyone a glass of Le Griffon wine, while introducing the next phase of dinner.

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

**CHRISTIE**
Headless?
(panicked)
Where are the heads? We didn't, like, eat them already, did we?
ROUSSEL
...and finally... civet of wild
boar, made in the correct fashion,
with red wine and blood pressed
from the carcass.

MAX
Why would one have it any other
way?

Roussel tries to pour wine for Papa, but Papa rudely
refuses in an unintelligible language. He gets up, walks
to the cabinet, and searches for another bottle of wine.

CHRISTIE
I can't seem to make Papa out.
What kind of accent is that?

MADAME ROUSSEL
Papa only speaks Provencal; the
language of Mistral.

ROUSSEL
Very few still understand it. It
is now practiced exclusively by
poets and sodomites.

Papa returns with another bottle of red.

MADAME ROUSSEL
Non, Papa!

Both Max and Christie notice how forcefully Madame
Roussel fights to stop the bottle from arriving at
the table.

ROUSSEL
(explaining)
It is a special vintage...we are
waiting for it to mature.
(to Madame Roussel)
It's okay, Ludivine...

Papa Roussel sits. He tries to open the bottle, but is
shaking too much, so hands it to Christie. She pulls the
cork. Pours a taster for herself. Sips. She likes.

CHRISTIE
(reading the label)
Le Coin Perdu?
(amused)
Does that mean what I think it
does?
ROUSSEL
The godforsaken spot. Oui.

Abruptly changing the subject--

MADAME ROUSSEL
Mr. Max, why don't you tell the young girl about her father?

MAX
Because as far as I'm concerned -- nose notwithstanding -- her lineage is suspect.

CHRISTIE
Max, do you have any idea what it's like to not have a father? Your whole life...an unending chain of what-ifs. This is my chance to find out who made me -- and I don't give a rat's ass if you believe me or not.

MAX
The house is mine. I own it. That's the way Uncle wanted it.

Papa Roussel turns to Max and mumbles something.

MAX
What did he say?

ROUSSEL
He said..."Do not fool yourself, Monseuir. In Provence, a man does not own his house...it is his house that owns him."

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

Everyone is swollen from the sheer volume of food...but still...there's the cheese plate... And great wedges of tarte aux pommes... And diamond-shaped, almond biscuits. Christie looks anaesthetized. Roussel makes another tour of the table, pouring glasses of a pale, oily liquid.

CHRISTIE
What is it?

ROUSSEL
Marc de Provence. I made it myself. You must...
CHRISTIE
C’est tout. No mas. No more...
(room spinning)
Oh boy, I think it’s time for me
to go...

She stands, holding onto the table for balance.

MADAME ROUSSEL
Papa will walk you home.

CHRISTIE
Thanks, but Papa’s fondled me
enough for one evening.

Papa farts.

CHRISTIE
Thank you Mr. and Mrs. Roussel.
You may have done the impossible:
changed my opinion of bulimia.

Christie stumbles out.

MAX
Must have been the cookies.

ROUSSEL
(to Max)
We will talk now.

EXT. TERRACE - SECONDS LATER

Max and Roussel are back on the terrace, alone.

MAX
You want to buy Le Griffon? With
what money?

ROUSSEL
(offers a glass)
More marc?

MAX
I saw the books this morning, you
haven’t made a profit in more than
a decade.

ROUSSEL
It is true that an outright
purchase is beyond my reach.
(MORE)
ROUSSEL (CONT'D)
But given my histoire with your Uncle, I felt that you might consider a monthly payment plan...directly to you.

Roussel hands him a sheet of paper with a number scribbled on it. Max looks it over.

ROUSSEL
I think you will see it is a fair amount.

This is getting harder for Max. Roussel's a nice guy.

MAX
Roussel, my estate agent is coming down tomorrow afternoon to present me with a stack of all cash offers.

ROUSSEL
Estate agent? But they are all bandits!

MAX
Charlie's no bandit, though he did go to Eton. The point is, being down here has put my job in jeopardy -- not to mention the 10 grand a day in fines. I simply can't go back to London with a check that won't even cover my dry cleaning bill.

EXT. ROUSSEL'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

Roussel slams the door on Max. Tipsy and stuffed beyond reason, Max tramples through Roussel's garden, crushing his flowers, then tripping over something. He sits up. It's Christie, who's passed out on the ground.

CHRISTIE
(babbling)
No more. Please. No more food.

INT. BASTIDE - STAIRWELL - LATER

Max carries Christie upstairs.

CHRISTIE
Beaks are for pecking, Max -- not for eating.
INT. CHRISTIE'S BEDROOM - LATER

Max tucks her in, gently. Brushes her hair away from her face, like a loving father. Studies her nose. Max can't help himself. The booze has opened him up...

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

Max stops himself abruptly. As he heads for the door--

CHRISTIE
Bonsoir, Max-a-million.

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

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Max is surely too drunk to drive. He swerves on the road, holding a glass of wine with his left hand, which dangles out the window. He's whistling the Marseillaise.

INT. CHEZ FANNY - NIGHT

It's a small, unpretentious cafe, with paper tablecloths and Marcel Pagnol film posters on the walls. The place is empty. Max stumbles in...

MAX
Fanny?
(no answer)
Fan-eeeeee!

FANNY
(from the kitchen)
*Un moment, Max!*

Max discovers a corner table, candlelit, with a decanted bottle of wine breathing on top. He sits. Fanny emerges from the kitchen, looking sweaty and disheveled, but sexy as hell. She places a casserole dish in front of him...

FANNY
I thought you might be hungry.
MAX
Oh, I--

FANNY
I must warn you Max: many men have chased my heart...but only those who adore my food have caught it.

MAX
Starving. Really, I am. What is it?

FANNY
My specialty.

She lifts the lid.

FANNY
Pigeon.

EXT. RUE HENRI SAVORNIN - LATER THAT NIGHT

Max and Fanny are arm-in-arm, walking down the street. Things are quiet, just a pair of rowdy TEENAGERS playing boules on a candlelit court, listening to "Moi, Lolita."

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

MAX
(heavyhearted)
Did he say we lost touch?

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

MAX
(guilty; defensive)
It wasn't lost. I can still remember everything -- his dissertation on Wagner's Ring cycle, his lecture on courting Danish women...even his demonstration on how to gut a chicken.

FANNY
I am not sure if that is what he feared was lost.
MAX
I gave up apologizing for my life
a long time ago. Truth is, Uncle
Henry just couldn't accept that
this place doesn't fit my life.

FANNY
So long as you are happy.

MAX
I am when I win.

FANNY
Pourquoi?

Max has to think about this.

MAX
Because I hate to lose.

FANNY
So your life is devoted to
avoiding what you hate, rather
than pursuing what you love?

MAX
(innuendo)
It's not a firm rule.

She smiles; he may be arrogant, but he's charming too...
They arrive at Fanny's bike, which is resting against a
tree. She climbs onto it.

MAX
May I see you tomorrow?

FANNY
Tomorrow is Chopin, at the town
Chateau...
    (points up to
    Chateau)
I will be catering.

MAX
So? I love French music.

FANNY
Chopin was Polish.
    (smiles)
But you are welcome anyway...
Adieu Max Skinner.
She pulls out into the night, leaving Max feeling something he hasn’t in a long time: happy.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. KITCHEN - NEXT MORNING

Max drinks coffee, grasping his aching head, hungover. Madame Roussel enters with her vacuum cleaner and bucket, and drops the stuff on the ground, loudly... Max is perplexed. Why did she show up?

MAX
Madame Roussel? Does your husband know you’re here?

MADAME ROUSSEL
This morning, he ordered me not to return. When I explained that I had made a promise to Henri...that I would look after you...he was unmoved. So I moved him...with my cast iron skillet.

She begins to wash the dishes. Max’s Blackberry rings:

MAX
Gemma, I’m nursing a hangover bigger than JK Rowling’s bank account, this better be good.

GEMMA (O.S.)
I thought you should know, Max: word around the office is that Kenny went up to see Sir Lawton last night.

INT. LONDON - STREET - SAME

Gemma walks on the sidewalk to work...

GEMMA
Apparently, that king-kiddie took credit for all your earnings this past week.

MAX (O.S.)
That little twit.
GEMMA
Max, whatever life crisis you’re
going through down there, I think
it’s right time you sobered up,
pulled the hayseeds out of your
hair, and come back here...
otherwise, there may be nothing to
come back to.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Christie shuffles into the kitchen, wearing sunglasses,
majorly hungover.

CHRISTIE
Water. Lots of water.

Like a sleepwalker, she makes her way to the refrigerator
and takes out a bottle of Vittel. Plops down across from
Max. Gulps it down like an athlete.

MADAME ROUSSEL
Pastis, wine and marc -- a recipe
for catastrophe. C’est fou.

CHRISTIE
Coffee. Lots of coffee.

KNOCK! KNOCK! It’s the front door.

EXT. BATSIDE - SAME

Max opens the door. A BUREAUCRATIC-LOOKING MAN, holding
a clipboard, stands before him.

BUREAUCRAT
Parlez-vous Français?

MAX
Oh-- Uh-- J’regrette...mon
français est...tres mal.

Roussel appears from out of nowhere, menacingly. A
bandaged welt covers his forehead.

ROUSSEL
I will be happy to translate.

The Bureaucrat speaks to Roussel, who translates...

ROUSSEL
My name is Denis Allary. I am the
regional inspector for the INAO...
MAX
What’s that?

ROUSSEL
(explaining)
*Institut National des Appellations d’Origine.* It is the regulatory authority that oversees compliance with all laws regarding the making of wine...

(listens; translates)
Unfortunately, after a thorough inspection of your vineyard, I have found several infractions.

MAX
What sort of infractions?

Roussel listens to Denis. Nods. Translates.

ROUSSEL
Vines planted too close to each other. Too many grapes on each plant...

MAX
(incredulous)
This is a joke—

ROUSSEL
...improper declaration of grape variety. I have no recourse but to level punitive fines.

Denis tears a sheet of paper from his clipboard and hands it to Max.

MAX
Fifteen thousand Euros?!

ROUSSEL
Until these fines are paid, this estate cannot transfer hands.

Now Max gets it. Roussel is behind this.

MAX
(to Roussel)
You know this guy, don’t you?

ROUSSEL
(offended)
Patronage between winemaker and Inspector is strictly prohibited.
Roussel smiles, cunningly. Bastard.

INT. RESTAURANT CLAIR HOULLEBECQ - DAY

Maitre Auzet indulges in a ten-course, gourmet lunch. As she eats, she glances over Max's "fine."

MAX
I'm not gonna let that French peasant stop me from selling my house!

AUZET
May I remind you that -- until the matter with Ms. Roberts is resolved -- the house isn't yours.

MAX
She may have a legal right to be there, but not him. I want that troglodyte off my land!

AUZET
To do that, I would have to apply for an eviction order -- from the same judge who is deciding your case with Ms. Roberts.

MAX
So? He'll be able to keep the cases separate...
     (suddenly concerned)
Won't he?

AUZET
A millionaire throwing an old farmer out of his meager cottage?

MAX
Hey, he may be old, but his place isn't meager.

AUZET
I can almost guarantee your actions will unfavorably influence the judge's decision with respect to Ms. Robert's claim. As I said before, in France, the underdog is always favored.

MAX
But I'm the underdog! Dammit, whose side are you on anyway?
Auzet

My legal duty has -- and always will be -- to the deceased...
Now, if you will excuse me, Mr. Skinner, you are disturbing my lunch.

EXT. POOL - DAY

Scorching hot. Christie lies on her stomach on a chaise lounge, suntanning. Beside her are a few old shoe boxes, overflowing with papers. She's going through Henry's letters, photos, etc... Max appears above her, irate.

Max
What do you think you're doing?

Christie
Did you know that Dad mixed a martini for Winston Churchill?

Max
Those are my Uncle's private papers.

Christie
He also had lunch with Amelia Earhart...in a Burger King!

Max snaps the papers out of her hand.

Max
Don't mistake my drunken confession last night as some kind of license to get comfortable around here. If I win this case, your ass is still packing. And if I don't, I'll hire the best solicitor money can buy to guarantee you regret the day you ever got between me and this house.

Christie
You know something Max...when Ms. Auzet told me I might be entitled to Le Griffon, I told her I was 21, what would a 21-year old girl want with an estate in Provence? But after spending a little time with you, I'm pretty sure I do want it...just so I can break your peanut-sized balls.
She gets up and picks up the shoe boxes--

MAX
I said hands off my stuff--!

They battle for the boxes, until they slip loose, and erupt into the air--! Max and Christie watch helplessly as the papers flutter into the pool.

CHRISTIE
Dickhead!

Christie storms into the house, her back pink from too much sun... Max scrambles for the pool skimmer and frantically scoops the papers out of the water...

EXT. POOL - LATER

Max is laying each letter and photo side-by-side around the pool, in the sunlight; so they can dry. He can’t help but glance at some of them...

WOMAN’S VOICE
(letter from a mistress:)
...Henry, my love, Gstadt is cold and empty without you...

UNCLE HENRY’S VOICE
(diary entry)
...the benefits of Aleppo soap are unproven by science -- and that is why I have faith in its powers...

MAX’S VOICE
(another letter:)
...my first month on the job and I can barely keep my eyes open. You think maybe you can send me some of that muddy coffee you used to drink? I’ve been telling everyone here that when I get a break, I’m going to my vineyard in Provence. They think I’m barking mad. Shit, only one month and I’m already thinking about vacation. Bad sign, huh? You know, Uncle Henry, I’m only 23, but I’m beginning to see that the struggle of life isn’t about getting what you want, but about what you’re willing to give up to get it...
It's a brutally profound message; from his younger self no less... Then, Max comes upon a photo...and double-takes. He looks closely:

It's duplicate of Christie's Golden Gate Bridge photo!

MAX

Oh...shit...

He flips the photo around. Scribbled in his Uncle's writing it says: "Alison Roberts. The San Francisco Treat."

HONK! HONK!

MAX'S POV - THE DRIVEWAY

It's Charlie, pulling up in a convertible Smart Car. Max quickly stuffs the photo into his pocket...

EXT. BASTIDE - DRIVEWAY - SECONDS LATER

Charlie is standing on the front seat of the car, looking like an apparition from another world. He's dressed in a double-breasted blazer, pale grey flannels, and a Panama Hat. He takes in the estate--

CHARLIE
Max, you old bugger! Forget my early estimates! This place is worth four million easy...MAYBE MORE!

MAX

SHHHHH!

(looks up at Christie's window)
Jesus, Charlie, the whole world doesn't need to know our business.

CHARLIE
Not three days and you're already acting like a bloody frog.

EXT. GARDEN - LATER

Max has just downloaded Charlie on everything.

CHARLIE
Max, I can't sell a house you don't legally own.
MAX
The judge's decision is due any minute now. All I want you to do is proceed as though nothing's wrong. No need to spook any of the buyers before there's a problem, right?

CHARLIE
I suppose not.

MAX
Now what's going on with the South Africans?

CHARLIE
Oh, they're old news. This morning, a big whale from France came in with a triple X number -- totally obscene. Provided the oenologue's report is satisfactory, the new bidder is prepared to write us a blank check.

(looking around)
But enough business-talk. I want to enjoy the country... What's on the agenda? Steak frites? Bottle of Ricard? An afternoon 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
Cultural activity with an old friend.

CHARLIE
So that's it, then? You're abandoning your best mate here, all alone?
MAX
You’re not alone.
(points upstairs)
She’s here.

Off Charlie’s look of terror...

INT. MAX’S CAR - MOVING

Max is driving to town. He dials a number...

INT. LONDON - LAWTON BROTHERS - SAME

Kenny’s cellphone rings. He answers.

KENNY
Max? Why are you calling me on my mobile?

MAX
I’ll explain later. Right now I want you to start selling 20-year gilts short at 99.10.

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

MAX
Kenny, you’re gonna have to stop being a chickenshit. Monday’s auction is gonna trade like a dog. And if you want to take credit for my work, at least take credit for the big ones, you boob.

KENNY
(busted)
I’ll get right on it, Max.

Kenny hangs up. Then, presses a button and speaks into his squawk box:

KENNY
It’s Kenny over at Lawton. I’d like to put in a bid for Monday’s gilt issue. 99.10 for the whole six billion...
INT. DEUTSCHE BANK - BOND TRADING FLOOR - SAME

Amis is walking out to leave for the day.

TRADER
Hey Amis! Looks like someone’s shorting Monday’s gilt issue.

Amis stops. Leans over and looks at the monitor.

TRADER
Pity. If we knew who the seller was, we could castrate this nancy boy and make a killing.

AMIS
Yes. I suppose we could...

INT. BASTIDE - UNCLE HENRY’S STUDY - NIGHT

Charlie sits in a smoking jacket (with a coat of arms on it), sipping scotch, reading Keats.

CHRISTIE (O.S.)
Help! Help!

Charlie hopes the screams will go away. But they don’t.

CHRISTIE
Anyone! Please!

INT. CHRISTIE’S ROOM - SECONDS LATER

Christie is lying on the bed, naked, face down. Her back is completely toasted. Charlie enters...and sees her perfect little ass staring right at him.

CHRISTIE
Who’s that?

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

She quickly grabs a towel. Covers her butt.

CHRISTIE
Okay, listen “Max’s friend,” I need you to come over here and tell me what my back looks like.

Charlie edges closer, nervously.
CHARLIE
Well, Mademoiselle, right now, your back is approximately the color of a ripe pomegranate.

CHRISTIE
Oh God--

CHARLIE
I'll fetch a doctor.

CHRISTIE
No! No! I won't let a foreign doctor treat me.

CHARLIE
Really, don't you think that's a bit xenophobic?

CHRISTIE
I take offense to that. My best friend got hives in Spain once. Instead of a cortisone shot, they put her on dialysis.

CHARLIE
Perhaps she drank too much sangria and needed a flush?

CHRISTIE
Just check the medicine cabinets. I'm sure there's some aloe around. And if there isn't, some aspirin and a big bucket of ice'll do.

Charlie moves to leave--

CHRISTIE
By the way, I'm Christie.

CHARLIE
How do you do, Christie. I'm Charles Willis III.

CHRISTIE
Love your accent.

CHARLIE
Love your bum.

EXT. LOURMARIN - EVENING

Lots of cars are parked in all conceivable places -- on sidewalks, in driveways, on patios.
Max squeezes his Smart Car into a tiny space between an ice cream cart and a statue.

EXT. CHATEAU - EVENING

Max heads up the steps to the chateau's courtyard, looking dapper in one of his Uncle's short-sleeved Oxfords.

ANGLE ON - CATERING AREA

Fanny looks captivating; even while wearing the demure apron that protects her from collarbone to knee. She's directing a crew of teenaged SERVERS, who carry off plates of food.

MAX
Vous semblez jolie ce soir. (You look beautiful tonight.)

In place of a response, Fanny wraps an apron around Max's waist.

MAX
Whoa--!

FANNY
One of my servers called in sick tonight...

Fanny rams a tray of salads into Max's hands.

FANNY
You are in charge of tables three and six.

MAX
Wait a second-- Can we talk about this?

FANNY
Remember: this is France -- the customer is always wrong.

She pushes him off.

EXT. CHATEAU - COURTYARD - EVENING

It's a very posh crowd. A few dozen round tables have been arranged in the courtyard, which is buzzing with talk and laughter. Children chase each other through the forest of adult legs. Up front, an ivory-colored Steinway piano awaits a Pianist.
SERIES OF SHOTS

Max pours wine, serves food, and tries his best to understand people when they ask him for things in French: more bread, more wine, etc... With every free moment, his eyes search for Fanny, who magically navigates the flow of food. At one point, Max catches her gaze. She mouths the words "merci." It's an intimate moment, spoiled when a little boy bounces a radish off of Max's face...

INT. CHRISTIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

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

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

CHRISTIE
I've got all this free time before I start Graduate School...I've got to go somewhere... Maybe Venice?

CHARLIE
At this time of year there are more tourists in Venice than pigeons. Also, one false step and you're in a canal, being run over by gondolas. Damned dangerous place, it is.

(hard sell)
Now London...London has it all: the theater, clubs, pubs, shops, restaurants, Beefeaters, Buckingham Palace, Notting Hill, and best of all, taxi drivers who speak English. Come to think of it, everyone speaks English.

CHRISTIE
Except Keith Richards.

CHARLIE
Of course, the biggest advantage is that you'd have someone to show you around. Moi.

CHRISTIE
Uh, Charlie.
CHARLIE

Yes, luv?

CHRISTIE

Hands off my ass.

CHARLIE
(sputtering)
Oh-- Terribly sorry--

EXT. CHATEAU - COURTYARD - EVENING

Max takes a break, sharing a plate of food with Fanny.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

Career change?

Maitre Auzet appears, looking damn sexy in a skimpy dress. Fanny and Auzet exchange an unfriendly glance.

MAX

Actually, this entire trip is starting to feel like a very peculiar form of penance.

AUZET

Penance?

MAX

That’s right. Losing’s never been so much fun.

He exchanges a smile with Fanny.

AUZET

Well, Mr. Skinner, I have finally managed to lock down my friend, Jean-Marie, the oenologue. He has an appointment tomorrow in Cassis, and intends to stop by on his way down. Expect him at ten.

MAX

I’ll be there... Bonsoir.

Auzet heads off. Fanny shoots her dagger eyes.

MAX

What’s the matter? Don’t like redheads?
FANNY
I have no problem with redheads. I do, however, have a problem with Ms. Auzet. Her office is a magnet for shady people.

MAX
You mean Yakuza-wannabes and Opec-lookin' Saudis buying up your best vineyards?

FANNY
(nodding)
Once I broached the subject with her and she warned me to mind my own business.

From far off, we hear the RUMBLE of thunder.

MAX
By the way: this is the best sea bass I've ever had.

FANNY
It's lasagna.

INT. BASTIDE - KITCHEN - NIGHT
Christie is feeling much better. She pulls the cork from a bottle of 2000, the unlabeled wine.

CHRISTIE
Wait until you taste this. It's divine, really, it is.

She pours a taster for Charlie, who picks up the glass by it's stem. He tries to show off--

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

He tilts the glass to observe it's color.

CHARLIE
Magnificent hues of brick red, indicating a mature Burgundy.

CHRISTIE
It's a Bordeaux.
CHARLIE
Oh. Next, the retro-nasal cavity...

He swirls 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...

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

CHARLIE
And finally, the pleasures of the mouth, tongue, and palate.

He takes a sip, holding it in his mouth while he begins trilling in air. He swallows. Moans.

CHARLIE
Mmmm... An open-textured wine with hints of currant, plum, and old carpet.

Christie sips. Sips again. Something comes to her.

CHRISTIE
Tastes so familiar.

CHARLIE
Well you have had it before.

CHRISTIE
No, like...

Christie jumps up, inspired.

CHRISTIE
We have to go to the vineyard!

EXT. LOURMARIN - NIGHT

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

A PIANIST in a tuxedo plays a magnificent rendition of Chopin's "Prelude to a Raindrop." 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. People quickly scatter to find shelter in the chateau...or in their nearby cars.

INT. MAX'S CAR - NIGHT

Max and Fanny scramble into his car. They are drenched and out of breath. They sit, just listening to the sound of the rain as it pounds down on the roof of his car.

MAX
Do you think my Uncle would have been upset about me selling Le Griffon?

FANNY
I think he would be more upset that you were treating Roussel like a piece of furniture.

MAX
I offered him a settlement.

FANNY
If someone offered you a check for the thing you loved most, would you take it?

MAX
The only thing I ever really loved was my Uncle...
(melancholy)
What an idiot I was. A treasure trove of wisdom...derived from a life of simple pleasures. And I couldn't even find the time to send the old bugger a postcard.

Silence.

FANNY
Max. I would very much like for you to recount your memory of me.

MAX
Yeah? Well I would very much like to recount it for you...
(beat)
(MORE)
MAX (CONT’D)
It starts where all my great
memories start: Le Griffon...

EXT. LE GRIFFON - 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, 12, 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.

UNCLE HENRY
Given the book’s title, I don’t
expect you’ll be surprised by the
ending, Max.
(to Mother)
Come now, Ms. Chenal, there are
many attractions here at Le
Griffon, beginning with the view,
which, fortuitously, is best
appreciated from my bedroom...

Uncle Henry puts his hand on Ms. Chenal’s ass, and they
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
Je...m’apelle...uhhh...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.

MAX (O.S.)
...and then...after you kissed
me...you said...you said...?
INT. MAX'S CAR - SAME - PRESENT

MAX
Shit. I don't remember. The best part and my mind's a blank.

FANNY
Perhaps...we can find a way to revive your memory?

Fanny leans in. Kisses Max.

MAX
Oh, it's a deeper memory than that.

INT. ROUSSEL'S COTTAGE - LATER

Roussel is fast asleep. Madame Roussel shakes him awake--

MADAME ROUSSEL
Claude! There are lights!

Roussel jumps up, peeks out the window--

ROUSSEL'S POV - THROUGH WINDOW

Far off, Roussel can see a flashlight moving toward the limestone hectare...

EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - MINUTES LATER

Sheets of water pound the soil. Christie, ever the trooper, scoops up a wilted bunch of embryonic grapes. She holds them up beneath a flashlight for Charlie--

CHRISTIE
Notice anything?

CHARLIE
(frightened)
Perhaps we should wait for the typhoon to pass!

CHRISTIE
It hasn't fallen off. It's been clipped off. See the diagonal cut on the stem?
(points down the row of vines)
And look -- there too.
(MORE)
CHRISTIE (CONT'D)
I’ll bet it’s the same through this whole patch.

CHARLIE
Did I mention I’m wearing a new pair of Church’s shoes?

CHRISTIE
It’s called vendage verte. You cut off two out of three young bunches so that the bunch that’s left gets all the nourishment. That makes it more concentrated, with a higher alcoholic content. It’s slow and expensive, because you have to do it by hand. But it makes for a much better wine.

CHARLIE
Max seemed to indicate the wine here was -- well, how do I put this delicately? bollocks.

CHRISTIE
That’s because Roussel’s only doing it here, in this hectare. Nowhere else. Problem is, the yield here wouldn’t be enough to impact the overall quality of the cuvee... It’s like putting a Rolls Royce spark plug into a Ford Escort and expecting it to run like a luxury car. It doesn’t make any sense... Unless...

CHARLIE
Unless he’s making a completely different wine here?

They can HEAR the sound of BARKING.

CHRISTIE
Just Roussel’s hunting dogs.
(Charlie blanches)
Relax, they’re caged.

CHARLIE
Then why do they sound like they’re...

They see the pack of hounds, trailed by Roussel, approaching.

CHRISTIE
Oh shit. Run Charlie! Run!
Charlie and Christie take off!

INT. BASTIDE - ENTRYWAY - SAME

Max and Fanny stumble up the stairs, in heat, ripping each other’s clothes off. But Max pulls away--

MAX
Wait-- Before we do this--

FANNY
I do not care, Max. I have made love to many married men.

MAX
No, no -- I’m not married. (then) I just need to know... (beat) Did you sleep with my Uncle?

FANNY
If I did, you would turn me away?

MAX
I’d have to.

Beat.

FANNY
No. I did not sleep with Henri.

Relieved, Max returns to ravaging her.

FANNY
But of course I tried.

EXT. VINEYARD - SAME

Roussel’s hounds can’t track the scent... too much rain. They circle around, sniffing each other’s asses, utterly confused. Roussel lets out a frustrated ROAR!

INT. BASTIDE - ENTRYWAY - MINUTES LATER

Charlie and Christie burst through the front door, slamming it shut. Both drenched and covered in mud. After he catches his breath--

CHARLIE
Well, I for one, have newfound respect for rabbits.
CHRISTIE
We have to tell Max about the wine.

Charlie looks on the floor and sees Max and Fanny's clothes making a trail upstairs...

CHARLIE
I propose we wait 'til morning.

Christie picks up Fanny's lacy bra.

CHRISTIE
Agreed.

CUT TO:

EXT. LE GRIFFON - MORNING - ESTABLISHING

Madame Roussel sweeps the courtyard. Suddenly, we HEAR Charlie SCREAMING from his room:

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

Madame Roussel charges into the house with her broom...

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Max throws a piece of French toast into a sizzling frying pan. Fanny sits on the kitchen table, wrapped in a sheet, sipping coffee.

FANNY
French toast?

MAX
Freedom toast. We stopped using French before everything except kissing.

Charlie and Christie enter the kitchen, with serious faces on.

MAX
What is it?

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Max, Fanny, Christie and Charlie all hash it out.
MAX
Garage wine?

CHARLIE
One could easily call them
boutique wines, or haute couture
wines. Small vineyards, small
production, seriously big prices.

CHRISTIE
It's simple: you select a minute
piece of soil and throw a small
fortune at it. Then, you pare
down the yields and vinify the
grapes in new oak barrels so the
stuff tastes like it was made on
a first growth estate.

FANNY
*Le Pin* is the best known at the
moment.

CHARLIE
There is, however, a young
upstart...it's only been around
for a couple of years. But it's
developing quite a reputation.

CHRISTIE
It's called *Le Coin Perdu*.

MAX
The stuff we drank at Roussel's
the other night?

Christie nods.

CHARLIE
Max, I called one of my clients in
London this morning...a wealthy
collector. Claims the stuff is
selling for 3000 a case, sterling!

MAX
So? Roussel had a bottle of it.
Good for him.

CHRISTIE
Remember the other night, you
opened a bottle of unlabeled wine
here?

MAX
The 2000?
She produces an empty 2000 bottle.

CHRISTIE
This is Le Coin Perdu! Roussel’s making it here.

MAX
Here? Where?

CHRISTIE
I discovered a small hectare, hidden past the trees.

FANNY
Excuse my bluntness, but making a garage wine in Provence -- an appellation not known for fine wines -- would be foolish.

CHRISTIE
That’s why he’s passing it off as a Bordeaux. Bottling it that way. Labeling it that way. Selling it that way...

She produces an empty Le Coin Perdu bottle; places it on the table next to the 2000. An exact match.

CHRISTIE
Dug it out of their trash this morning. Read the label...

FANNY
(reading)
Appellation Bordeaux Controle.

MAX
If this stuff is worth what you say it is, it would explain why Roussel’s so adamant about my not selling the vineyard...

(then)
Still, it’d be great to have an expert take a look.

There’s a KNOCK at the side door.

VOICE (O.S.)
Allo?

All turn and see an ELEGANT MAN standing at the door. He has a quaffed grey goatee and wears a silk ascot and blue blazer with gold buttons.
MAX
Sorry, sir, cave's closed.

MAN
Ah, oui, anglais... I am Jean-Marie Brunier. I was contacted by Maitre Auzet--

MAX
The oenologue!

EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - DAY

Everyone watches Jean-Marie as he finishes surveying the stony hectare...

MAX
So... what can you tell us about this area here?

JEAN-MARIE
(shrugs)
More like a quarry than a vineyard.

CHRISTIE
Wait a sec -- if it's such lousy land, why clip all those bunches then?

JEAN-MARIE
Perhaps it is a peasant's misguided attempt to salvage what he could?

FANNY
I have known Claude Roussel for many years. He does not strike me as "misguided."

JEAN-MARIE
You misinterpret me, Mademoiselle. It is an honorable effort, no doubt. But akin to taking one's time while cooking a Big Mac. The end result will always be sub-par.

CHARLIE
So there's no way this hectare could be producing a garage wine? A Bordeaux-quality claret?

Jean-Marie laughs.
JEAN-MARIE
One might as well try to grow
asparagus in the Sahara.
(looks at his watch)
I must be going...the drive to
Cassis will take over an hour.
(then)
If it is acceptable, I will have
my office fax the preliminary
report to Ms. Auzet's office this
afternoon...

MAX
That'll be fine, thank you.

Jean-Marie walks off, leaving everyone staring at
Christie. After all, it was her theory.

CHRISTIE
Okay, so I have an over-active
imagination.
(then)
What is it Charlie, you look pale?

CHARLIE
That pompous Frenchman may well
have just knocked a "fuck you" off
our sale price! Maybe even a
"fuck you" and a half!

Charlie stomps off. The girls are confused. Max's
Blackberry VIBRATES.

MAX
Hello?
(listens)
We'll be there in ten minutes.

INT. AZUET'S OFFICE - LATER

Max and Christie sit silently across from Auzet's desk.

AZUET
The judge has decided that the
photograph is insufficient
evidence to order a disinterment.

Christie lowers her head. Max should feel happy, but he
doesn't.
Auzet
Naturally, if further evidence should be uncovered, the judge would be more than happy to review the case... Barring that -- and provided you pay the fines -- you are free to sell the house, Mr. Skinner. And I'm afraid that means Ms. Roberts must now vacate the premises...

INT. MAX'S CAR - MOVING

Max drives Christie home. She looks devastated. Max feels enormous guilt.

Christie
I'll pack when I get back.

Max
Don't be silly. Stay as long as you like.

Tears begin to stream down Christie's face. It's too much for Max. He cracks.

Max
Okay, look... once I sell the house, and the ink is dry, I'll hire a solicitor and see if I can get Henry's body exhumed.

Christie
Really?

Max nods.

Christie
Wait, are you doing it because you care, or because Charlie wants to sleep with me?

Max
Charlie's gay.

Christie's jaw drops.

Max
Just kidding.

They both burst into laughter.
INT. BASTIDE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Fanny pulls a crispy Barbary duck from the oven.

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT

Everyone’s around the dinner table. Charlie pops the cork on a bottle of champagne. Pours.

CHARLIE
It’s the only wine you can hear.

CHRISTIE
The music of the grape.

Max raises his glass:

MAX
A toast... To Henry Skinner... A man whose absence can be felt... (his voice cracks) ...on every meter of this estate.

Max finally sheds a tear. Fanny takes his hand. Everyone clinks glasses.

MAX
Okay. Let’s eat.

Everyone digs in. And at the same time, they all make a face. Fanny really is a horrible cook...

INT. CAVE - LATE NIGHT

Charlie and Christie sit at the bottom of an empty fermenting vat, canoodling. Christie wears Uncle Henry’s candle hat. Charlie watches her inspect a glass of wine, severely lovestruck.

CHRISTIE
(sniffs)
Primitive, berry-earth aromas.
(sips)
Very silky...very rounded. A typical, brooding, Pinot Noir.

CHARLIE
I believe I have Pinot envy.
INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Dishes are everywhere. Only one light is on. Max and Fanny dance to a cheesy Johnny Hallyday cover...

MAX
Are we still "vous-ing" each other, or can we go informal?

Fanny grins, but her grin hides her sadness.

MAX
Look, this is not goodbye, okay? We’re only a few hours away from each other.
(he dips her)
Of course, nothing’s preventing us from airlifting your cafe to Kensington. God knows London could use a decent bistro.

FANNY
Max, it is not the length of a love affair that matters, only it’s intensity.

MAX
Why didn’t that sound so good?

FANNY
My father once told me that a single night with my mother would have been enough to keep him happy for his entire life.

MAX
Yeah, well, if you haven’t noticed, I’m greedy...

Beat.

MAX
Come back with me, Fanny.

FANNY
There is no need for me to come to London...when you already have a wonderful home here in Lourmarin.

MAX
We’ve been through this... Provence...Lourmarin...this place; it just doesn’t fit my life.
FANNY
No Max, it is your life that
doesn't fit this place. And as
long as it doesn't...how can your
life ever fit with mine?

They continue dancing, the romantic mood spoiled.

EXT. TENNIS COURT - MORNING

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

CHARLIE
Max, your pool is disgustingly
idyllic...
(sits down)
Where's the diving board, though?
(beat)
Well...here's the final draft.

He plops the contract on Max's lap.

MAX
How'd we do?

CHARLIE
The oenologue's report eviscerated
us. We settled with the French
bidder. It was a take-it-or-leave-
it offer.

Beat.

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

CHARLIE
I believe you're in love with a
lot more than her.

MAX
(sad irony)
Leave it to Uncle Henry to turn
his inheritance into a lesson in
self-examination... And what am
I gonna do with his last bit of
wisdom? What else? Sell it off
to the highest bidder...then pat
myself on the back for winning
again.
CHARLIE
Max, it isn’t too late to pull out. Why not keep the place as a vacation hideaway?

MAX
You know what happened when my mentor took his first vacation in fifteen years?

CHARLIE
What?

MAX
I stole his job. And for some inexplicable reason, I need to go back and crush the little squirt who’s trying to steal my job from me...

A gust of white pissenlit flowers swirls around Max and Charlie...looking like the Provencal version of a snow storm...

MAX
“There’s nowhere else in the world where you can keep busy doing so little and enjoy it so much…”

Without even looking at it, Max signs the contract.

MAX
You and Christie will stay to sort the new owners...?

CHARLIE
Of course.

Max gets up. And walks off...to a lonely place in the VINEYARD, where he stops...

EXT. VINEYARD - SAME

Roussel is on bended knees, weeding the soil. Max wanders up behind him...and can see that Roussel is singing the lilting aria “Flower Song” from Carmen.

ROUSSEL
La fleur que tu m’avais jetée.
Dans ma prison m’était restée.

WE ARE NOW IN A FLASHBACK. YOUNG MAX HIDES BEHIND THE VINES...AND WATCHES A MUCH YOUNGER ROUSSEL SING THE SAME SONG TO HIS GRAPES. UNCLE HENRY KNEELS NEXT TO MAX.
YOUNG MAX
Why does he sing to them, Uncle Henry?

UNCLE HENRY
Because, Max, the terroir has earned praise...although I'm not quite sure they deserve his voice.

YOUNG MAX
Terroir. I've been hearing that word all summer. You never told me what it meant.

UNCLE HENRY
Perhaps that's because -- like many French words -- it's conveniently untranslatable into English. Put simply, terroir is...the pleasure and magic of French winemaking -- all encapsulated in a single concept. Anything and everything that can imprint itself on the grape is part of the terroir. The mineral content of the soil; the amount of rainfall; the climate; the micro-climate. And, of course, there's always that inescapable element that winemakers have been wrestling with since time began...

MAX
Truth?

UNCLE HENRY
So you have been listening to me all summer?

YOUNG MAX
(kindly)
It's hard not to, you're always talking.

UNCLE HENRY
(smiles back)
Cheeky little sod... Follow me...

Henry gets up and Young Max follows. They start to walk side-by-side...row by row...and Older Max trails behind them, hanging on his Uncle's every word...

HENRY
Actually, I was thinking of balance, Max.

(MORE)
HENRY (CONT'D)
Balance in wine, it seems to me, is as elusive as balance in life... It requires a heart that can listen...notice, Max, the first four letters of heart are h-e-a-r. It also demands a mind that can accept paradox and contradiction, without abdicating the mathematical perfection of the universe... Take note Max: 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 what brings harmony to your terroir, take hold of it, and never...ever...let her go...

Uncle Henry is now staring right at Older Max now.

MAX

Her?

Uncle Henry smiles...and then...the memory fades away...

INT. AIRPLANE - FIRST CLASS - IN FLIGHT - EVENING

The CAMERA SLOWLY TRACKS up the aisle...passing rows of businesspeople, all hunched over their laptops and PDA's. WE STOP on Max, who stares out the window as the dark sky streaks past.

EXT. MAX'S BUILDING - NIGHT

Welcome back to rainy London. A town car pulls up.

INT. MAX'S BUILDING - LOBBY - SAME

Max passes by Bert, who stands ready with his mail.

BERT

Welcome back, Mr. Skinner.

MAX

Brought you a souvenir, Bert.

Max hands him a bottle of the unlabeled, 2000, wine.
BERT
Thanks very much, sir.
(the elevator doors
shut)
Probably bought it in duty free.

He tosses it into the trash.

INT. MAX'S APARTMENT - LATER

Max enters. Flicks on the lights. Home at last.

INT. MAX'S BEDROOM - SAME

Max lies down in bed. His apartment never seemed so
lifeless... He stares at the dripping rain shadows on
the ceiling... Then begins humming... and singing...

MAX
C'est pas ma faute à moi... Si
j'entends tout autour de moi...
Hello, helli, t'es a...
(smiles)
Moi Lolita...

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. LE GRIFFON - VINEYARD - MORNING

A perfect morning. Blue sky. Puffy, white clouds. Sun
spreading over the vines... THE CAMERA PULLS BACK... and
we see that we are actually looking at a digital photo...
We PULL BACK further, and see that it's being used as a
SCREEN SAVER on Max's computer...

INT. LAWTON BROTHERS - MORNING

Max sits at his desk, staring longingly at the image.

GEMMA
Max -- if you left your wits in
France, now would be a good time
to retrieve them.

MAX
(looks up)
I'm fine, Gemma. Just a little
jetlagged.
GEMMA
Yeah, that one hour time change is a real killer.

VOICE (O.S.)
You set me up, you wanker!

Kenny appears above Max, holding two file boxes. A pair of SECURITY GUARDS flank him.

MAX
Set you up? What could I do, Kenny? I've been suspended for the past week.

KENNY
It was your short order that got me fired!

MAX
They checked the phone logs, Alf. There's no recording of me placing that trade.

KENNY
You called my mobile!

MAX
Besides, only an amateur would be green enough to short the entire gilt issue. It's like dropping your pants in prison and expecting not to be gang-raped.

Big laughs all around.

GEMMA
Six million pounds...all lost in a three hour period.

MAX
It's a new company record, Kenny. Congratulations.

The Security Guards wrestle Kenny out of the office.

GEMMA
How'd you do it, Max?

MAX
I knew that Kenny wanted my job. I also knew that Amis desperately wanted his money back. All I did was play matchmaker.
GEMMA
So you win again?

MAX
Oh, I don't know...

He glances at the screensaver, melancholy.

MAX
It seems to me that, sometimes, when you win, you really lose.
(beat)
Come on...let's get to work...

INT. FSA BUILDING - OUTSIDE BOARDROOM - MINUTES LATER

Max paces outside the glass encased-boardroom. Inside, a dozen older men sit around a polished conference table.

MAX
Look at that one: he looks like Spike Milligan.

Gemma's cellphone rings.

GEMMA
Hello? Speaking...
(listens)
You're absolutely sure? Very well, thank you anyway.
(she hangs up)
That's odd.

MAX
What the matter?

GEMMA
That was the University of Bordeaux. I called them so I could send a check to your wine man...for services rendered.

MAX
And...?

GEMMA
The Dean said there's no one there by that name.

MAX
Jean-Marie Bruiner?

GEMMA
Never even heard of the bloke.
A SECRETARY enters--

    SECRETARY
    Mr. Skinner, the Commission is
    ready for you.

Max has an epiphany.

    MAX
    MERDE!

To Gemma's amazement, Max dashes off.

    GEMMA
    Max?! Max?!
    (to Secretary)
    Must be his colon. Very
    unpredictable.

EXT. FRANCE - FREEWAY and SPEEDING - DAY

Max is back in his Smart car, ripping down the freeway.

EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - DAY

Roussel's there, as always, working his vines.

    MAX (O.S.)
    The godforsaken spot.

Roussel stops weeding; turns around, sees Max standing
behind him.

    MAX
    Rather ironic name considering
    you're mining liquid gold here.

    ROUSSEL
    I do not understand--?

    MAX
    Oh, quit the toothless gauloise
    act, Roussel. I know the
    oenologue Ms. Auzet sent here was
    a phony. I don't get why she
    helped you, though. Must be some
    kind of French, esprit de corps
    rubbish. But now it's time to
    come clean...

Roussel rises, peels off his gloves. The jig is up, and
he knows it...
ROUSSEL
Mr. Max...I have worked here at Le Griffon for thirty-three years...ever since your Uncle bought the house. Many times I asked him to replace the vines, which were old and tired before he arrived, but for one reason or another, it was never the right time for him...

EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - YEARS EARLIER

ROUSSEL (O.S.)
There was one parcel which I knew could produce good wine... It had the right stony soil, the right exposure, the right terroir.

Roussel wanders through the patch, inspecting the vines, looking up at the sun...

EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - YEARS EARLIER

ROUSSEL
In the end, I spent everything I had on the best cabernet vine stock available...and replanted the land myself...

Roussel plants new vines by hand, toiling beneath the boiling hot sun...

EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - PRESENT

ROUSSEL
Of course, there were many times I almost told your Uncle...

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S STUDY - YEARS EARLIER

Uncle Henry reads while listening to music. Roussel walks past the door. He wants to tell Uncle Henry the truth, but chickens out, and walks off...

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - YEARS EARLIER

Madame Roussel tends to Uncle Henry, who's in bed, ashen.
ROUSSEL (O.S.)
But then he became ill...and while
it was not quite honest...I had
paid for everything, I had done
all the work; I wasn't stealing.
It seemed fair...

INT. CAVE - YEARS EARLIER

Roussel inserts a syringe into an oak barrel and draws
off several inches of wine. He fills a glass, holds it
up to the light, and tastes his new wine.

ROUSSEL
The results of my experiment
exceeded even my own expectations.
And yet, I realized I could not
sell the wine -- not legally
anyway, because the vines had not
been declared...

INT. MAITRE AUZET'S OFFICE - YEARS EARLIER

Roussel sits across from Auzet's desk, explaining his
dilemma.

ROUSSEL
So I went to Maitre Auzet, hoping
she could find a petite lacune in
the law. Instead of a loophole,
she offered to be my negociant, to
help me sell the wine...

EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - PRESENT

MAX
So that's why her office waiting
area is like the United Nations?
You make and bottle the wine --
she sells it to rich connoisseurs.

ROUSSEL
(nodding)
She said she would take care of
everything and pay me cash. No
paperwork, no taxes, no questions
asked.

MAX
(betrayed)
So all along...she's been
protecting her own interests?
ROUSSEL
(eyes glimmering)
Mr. Max...my whole life, people laughed at me when I sang to the vines. I explained that, someday, the vines would sing back...
Monsieur, Le Coin Perdu is a symphony so beautiful, Beethoven himself would be envious. Men from all over the world come to Lourmarin hoping to simply taste my wine...a wine they believe rivals those made in the great caves of Bordeaux. A wine that fetches higher prices than a Lafite or a Petrus. Imagine that? An old peasant with tired hands in league with the likes of a Rothschild?

MAX
It's quite an achievement.

ROUSSEL
Ach! I deserve little credit. Nature makes my wine. I merely guide the terroir on its trip to the grape. And it is this -- and only this -- that brings me joy. To wake up each morning and do what I love... Do you know what it means to do something because you love it? Do you, Mr. Max?

Roussel's very simple question hangs in the air. Max isn't quite sure if he can answer.

MAX
(heavy-hearted)
I sold it, Roussel.

ROUSSEL
Quoi?

MAX
Le Griffon. The bastide. Your vineyard. I sold it all--

ROUSSEL
AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!

Roussel charges Max and tackles him to the soil. Roussel may be old, but he's robust, and heavyset. He smothers Max beneath him, cursing him in French... Tati moves in too... and starts savaging Max's ankle.
Max kneels poor Roussel in the nuts. Roussel crumples to the ground. He's a beaten man, tears streaming down his face. Both out of breath, Max and Roussel stare at each other -- the peasant and the bond trader, covered in soil...not so different after all...

ROUSSEL
You are not a man... You are a...a...a mistake.

Roussel rises. Dusts himself off. And disappears into his vines...

EXT. VINEYARD - MINUTES LATER

With his ankle now bloody, Max frantically sprints toward the house, screaming:

MAX
Charlie! Cancel the sale! Cancel the sale!

EXT. BASTIDE - SECONDS LATER

Max hobbles up the driveway. Charlie and Christie emerge from the house...in matching bathrobes.

CHARLIE
Max, what the devil are you doing here?

MAX
(out of breath)
You have to cancel the deal, Charlie! Roussel is making Le Coin Perdu here! The oenologue was a fake! He just confessed everything to me!

CHRISTIE
I knew it!

CHARLIE
But we've already transferred title. Faxed everything over a few hours ago.

MAX
Dammit, Charlie, this place is worth ten times what I sold it for!

Just then, a shiny new Mercedes pulls into the driveway.
CHARLIE
Must be the new owner now.
The car pulls to a stop. Engine off...
And who climbs out of the car?
Maitre Auzet.

AUSZET
(to Charlie)
Mr. Willis? Delighted to meet you.

CHRISTIE
You sent the phony oenologue...?

MAX
To lower the price for yourself.

AUSZET
Frankly, Mr. Skinner, I have grown tired of your theatrics. And since the sale is complete -- and my work for your Uncle is also complete -- I must kindly ask you and your friends to vacate my premises immediately...otherwise I shall be forced to call the gendarmerie.

Auzet heads into the bastide--

CHRISTIE
Charlie, do something.

CHARLIE
I can’t, luv. She’s the legal owner.

MAX
No she isn’t.

Auzet stops. Turns around. Max reaches into his jacket pocket and pulls out the duplicate photo.

MAX
I found a duplicate of Christie’s photo...in Henry’s belongings.

CHRISTIE
You what?

Auzet looks concerned.
MAX
I’m sorry, Christie. I kept it a secret because I knew it would convince the judge to order a DNA test...and I didn’t want to lose the house to you.

CHRISTIE
(crushed)
You kept the truth from me...
even after I told you what finding my father meant to me?

MAX
It’s only because I knew from the moment you appeared that you were Henry’s daughter. The dramatic circumstances of your arrival...he couldn’t have scripted it better. Not to mention that certain brand of arrogant irony that Henry had perfected. Hell, you even have his nose...

(beat)
I don’t care who gets Le Griffon anymore. So long as Uncle Henry can look down and know that -- for once in my life -- I didn’t cheat...or squirm my way through a loophole. For once in my life, I earned the right to be his nephew.

Beat.

CHARLIE
(to Auzet)
I regret to inform you, Ms. Auzet, that this residence was sold under false pretenses, making the contract, I’m thrilled to say...

He snaps the contract out of her hands. Rips it in half.

CHARLIE
...void.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Fanny drives her Citroen, which has been repaired, but is still missing the passenger seat. She smokes a cigarette, and sings along with a French hip-hop song.
FANNY’S POV – UPCOMING ROAD

Something is sitting in the center of the road, blocking the way. Fanny gets closer...and closer...and sees...

It’s a car seat.

BACK TO SCENE

Stunned, Fanny stops her car. Gets out. All the luck, it’s a Citroen car seat.

MAX (O.S.)
Can you believe it? Must have fallen off the back of a truck or something...?

Fanny turns and sees Max climbing out an irrigation ditch on the side of the road. He walks to her. She’s beaming.

FANNY
Mais tu ete fou. (You’re crazy.)

MAX
You know, Fanny, my Uncle used to say that a man should celebrate his losses as deeply and often as his victories.

FANNY
This is prudent advice.

MAX
So if you don’t mind -- I’d like to celebrate the loss of absolutely everything I’ve worked for in the last fifteen years...

He takes Fanny into his arms.

MAX
Oh my God.

FANNY
What is it?

MAX
I just remembered what you said to me. When were kids...in the pool.

FANNY
Oui?
MAX
(recalling)
Yeah. You kissed me...and then
you said...

FANNY
"Forgive my lips... They find joy
in the most unusual places."

MAX
That's it.
(dawns on him)
Hey! You did remember! All
along!

FANNY
(nodding)
Bien sur. But it was not until
just now that I recognized you,
Max.

Max and Fanny smile, and fall into each others arms.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LE GRIFFON - A FEW WEEKS LATER

It's a wonderful September day. A cloudless, sunny sky,
with a soft breeze fanning through the valley...

EXT. VINEYARD - SAME

Roussel, happy as a clam, is directing a crew of PICKERS
who are harvesting the grapes: snipping the bunches off
their vines and dropping them into straw baskets. Tati
darts through their legs, chasing a rabbit...

EXT. TENNIS COURT - SAME

Fanny and Christie play a heated game of tennis.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Charlie sits beneath the trellis, staring at the chess
board, a game is in progress. From the cellar, we HEAR
the SOUND of bottles rattling...just as -- SLAM! --
Madame Roussel drops a tray of food onto the table.

MADAME ROUSSEL
Crespeou et salade.
CHARLIE

Enchanto, enchanto. Merci.

She shuffles off, muttering in French. Charlie indulges. Tastes great. Max emerges from the basement. Charlie watches him lazily shuffle over the gravel path, swinging a bottle of red.

CHARLIE

Any idea what cresseou is?

MAX

Cow brains omelette.

Charlie spits his food.

MAX

Just kidding.

Max sits and begins to open the bottle. They watch the girls play.

CHARLIE

I must say, Max, a 50-50 split between you and Christie will make matters of inheritance unreasonably complicated someday.

MAX

She’s my blood, Charlie. All confirmed now. Frankly, I’m stunned she offered me half, given the way I treated her.

Pop. Cork comes out. Max pours them both a taster...

CHARLIE

You realize, of course, you’ll never last here.

MAX

You takin’ odds on that?

Max swirls his wine. Sniffs.

CHARLIE

And as impossible as it may seem, you’ll get sick of Fanny too... Indeed, the very things you find sexy and unique about her now will soon become the dread of your day-to-day existence...

Max takes a sip...starts trilling.
CHARLIE
And then, after months of eating, drinking, sleeping, and bonking, what have you got to look forward to? A state-mandated four week vacation.

Max swallows.

MAX
Mmm. More fruity than nutty...

CHARLIE
Dammit, Max, you’re my best mate and I’m telling you: you won’t last! Just admit it now so when it all ends I won’t be forced to say “I told you so.”

MAX
...with a bumptious finish of thyme and furniture polish.

Seeing that Max is way too lost in the wine, Charlie proceeds to sniff. He’s impressed. He picks up the bottle to read the label.

CHARLIE
1987?

He takes a sip. Trills. Swallows.

CHARLIE
Mmm. A good year.

Max’s eyes focus on Fanny, who flashes her trademark dazzling smile. He responds in kind. Then quips:

MAX
We’ll see.

The Talking Heads song “Heaven” fades in...

Max and Charlie clink glasses...as the CAMERA drifts away from them...taking in the garden, and the tennis court, and the pool, and then the vineyard, and then finally, Le Griffon...just a tiny piece of terroir in a very big world.

Heaven...heaven is a place...

A place where nothing... nothing ever happens...

FIN