

A GOOD YEAR

screenplay by

Marc Klein

Based on the novel by Peter Mayle

White: 05/09/05
Blue: 05/09/05
Pink: 07/09/05
Green: 19/09/05

EXT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - LATE AFTERNOON

1

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...

2 EXT. FARMHOUSE - GARDEN - SAME

2

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

FRENCH DJ

*La prochaine chanson est exécutée
ce soir par Josphine Baker...*

MAX

(practicing French)

*La pro-shane...shan-sone...est ex-é-
cu-tée...*

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

MAX'S POV - ENTRANCE TO THE WINE CELLAR

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

BACK TO SCENE

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

THE WINE CELLAR

Emerging from the cellar is Max's UNCLE HENRY, early-50's. Uncle Henry is a sermonizing eccentric, with warm, knowing eyes, and the countenance of a man who hasn't worked very hard for a very long time. He wears a pair of pajamas -- shirt-top opened, revealing a round Buddha belly. He puffs on a cigar, as he crosses the lawn, swinging a bottle of red...

UNCLE HENRY

Max my boy -- seeing that it's your
last night here, I thought it only
appropriate that we open something
extra special...

He presents the wine with the flourish of a waiter.

UNCLE HENRY

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

He begins opening the bottle.

UNCLE HENRY

What was I talking about before?

MAX

Blue suits.

UNCLE HENRY

Blue suits?

MAX

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

UNCLE HENRY

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

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

UNCLE HENRY

Now where were we? Whose turn is it?

MAX

Mine.

Uncle Henry suspiciously studies the board. He quickly suspects that Max has moved his bishop.

UNCLE HENRY

Max, have I told you why I enjoy
making wine so much?

MAX

You don't make the wine, Uncle Henry, that guy Duflot does.

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

UNCLE HENRY

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

(swirls his wine)

Now then -- I enjoy making wine because this sublime nectar is, quite simply, incapable of lying. You see Max, all the work we do here at *La Siroque* -- 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.

3 EXT. LONDON - LAWTON BROTHERS OFFICE BUILDING - MORNING 3

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

MANY VINTAGES LATER...

4 INT. LAWTON BROTHERS - BOND TRADING BULLPEN - MORNING 4

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

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

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

MAX
Not yet, Alf.

KENNY
Boss, why do you keep calling me
Alf?

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

A phone RINGS. Max's assistant answers. She is GEMMA TAYLOR, mid-20's, a bright and attractive Englishwoman with a playful, oftentimes abusive, wit.

09/19/2005 4A.

GEMMA

Max Skinner's desk.

(beat)

One moment please.

(to Max)

It's Kimberly.

Max gives her the "thumbs down".

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

KENNY
115.40?

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

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

*
*

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

*

KENNY
115.50.

MAX
That's it! Go!

IA INT. STOCK EXCHANGE - CITY

4A

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

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

5

*

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 pre-
supposes 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!

6 SERIES OF SHOTS

6

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

7 INT. LAWTON BROTHERS -- A BIT LATER

7

MAX

Where we at?

KENNY

Down two big figures, 113.50!

INT. LUSTIG BANK - SAME

8 *

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

AMIS

This whole thing doesn't make any
sense. Unless...

INT. LAWTON BROTHERS - SAME

9

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...

INT. LUSTIG BANK - SAME

9A *

AMIS

(panicked)

Mother Mary, that filthy bugger
forced down prices, now he's gonna
buy everything back on the cheap!

INT. LAWTON BROTHERS - SAME

9B

GEMMA

You've gone too far this time, Max.

MAX

(braggart)

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

10

INT. LAWTON BROTHERS "CIRCUS CLUB" - MINUTES LATER

10

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

GANG

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

-- then, with the tiniest of voices --

GEMMA

I can!

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

MAX

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

The mob cheers. Max settles them with aplomb.

MAX

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

ALL IN UNISON

...IT'S THE ONLY THING!"

MAX

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

Max applauds his team...and makes brief eye contact with a TWENTYSOMETHING BEAUTY across the space.

MAX

Our competitors will say that what we did today exploited a loophole. That we "crossed a line" and broke a "sacred covenant of trust" within the bond trading fraternity. Well, to them I respectfully say:

(as erudite as possible)

"Ha -- ha!"

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

10A INT. SMALL FLAT - BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

10A

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

10B INT. TOWN CAR - NIGHT

10B

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

CNN NEWS ANCHOR

(London markets)

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

Max frowns, dismissive, clicks off.

1 EXT. LONDON STREETS - WET - DAWN

11

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.

2 INT. MAX'S APARTMENT BUILDING - WEE HOURS - MOMENTS LATER 12

A DOORMAN opens the door as Max enters, briefcase in tow.

09/19/2005 8A.

DOORMAN

Good morning, Mr. Skinner...
(handing Max his mail)
And congratulations.

MAX
Thank you, Bert.

DOORMAN
You mighta tipped me off, Mr. Skinner.

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

As the elevator doors shut.

DOORMAN
(sotto)
Tosser!

MAX
(sotto)
Wanker!

*
*

13 INT. MAX'S APARTMENT - DAWN

13

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

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

At a wet bar, Max pours himself a tumbler of scotch, decanter in one hand. Appraising the letter: *CABINET AUZET, NOTAIRES, RUE DES REMPARTS, 84160, GORDES.*

*

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

.4 INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME - DAWN

14

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

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

Along the river, the lights go out, signaling a new morning.

INT. MAX'S OFFICE - THE FOLLOWING DAY

15

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

KENNY

Ready for the fan mail?

(Max nods)

"Bastard." "Bastard." "Burn in hell." "Rot in hell." "Die."

"Congratulations, you're my hero."

MAX

Who was that from?

KENNY

Your attorney.

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

INT. MAX'S OFFICE - SAME

16

GEMMA

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

MAX

(blinking)

Oh! The one who sent me the letter.

GEMMA

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

MAX

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

GEMMA

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

(MORE)

09/19/2005 10A.

GEMMA (cont'd)

You're his closest blood relative,
so you get everything.

MAX
(disinterested)
What -- his clothes and LPs?

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

As Max digests that, Kenny enters behind her.

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

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

Max look at him, annoyed at the intrusion.

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

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

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

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

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

He shuts the door behind him. Gemma faces him.

09/19/2005 11A.

GEMMA

Tell me something, Max: did you
care for him?

MAX
Who?

GEMMA
Your uncle, of course.

Max has to give this pause.

GEMMA
When was the last time you spoke?

MAX
Ages ago.

GEMMA
Why?

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

EXT. EVENING - BERKELEY SQUARE - DRIZZLE

16A

Max strides with his umbrella, under the trees.

INT. HIP RESTAURANT - CORNER BOOTH - NIGHT

17

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

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

CHARLIE
Looks lovely, thank you. (another glance at them) *
Really, really lovely. *

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

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

He tilts the glass to observe its color. *

09/19/2005 12aA.

CHARLIE
Magnificent hues of brick red
indicating a mature Bordeaux.

*
*
*

WAITRESS

It's a Burgundy.

*
*

CHARLIE

(covering)

Slip of the tongue... 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...

*
*
*
*
*
*

MAX

It's coming out of your ears,
Charlie.

*
*
*

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

*
*

CHARLIE

Mmmm...

(to Waitress)

That'll do nicely. You can let it
breathe for a while...

(catches himself)

No, wait, we can do better than
that -- you can let it...regain
it's composure.

*
*
*
*
*
*
*

MAX

While I regain mine.

*
*

WAITRESS

(to Max)

Wine for you, sir?

MAX

A Rémy-Martin, a double, please.

*

CHARLIE

(to her, with one final
glance, which Max clocks)

Thank you.

MAX

Charlie, you should try and keep your eyes more...up. Makes her think you have serious intentions.

CHARLIE

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

MAX

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

CHARLIE

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

MAX

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

*
*
*

CHARLIE

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

Max grabs a hunk of bread. Starts nibbling.

MAX

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

CHARLIE

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

MAX

Yeah? What's a chateau goin' for these days?

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

CHARLIE
A few "f-you's." Maybe more.

MAX
(delighted)
Bless that old sod!

CHARLIE
I won't cut my commission.

MAX
I didn't ask you to.

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

CUT TO:

18 OMITTED

18

EXT. MARIGNANE AIRPORT - DAY

19

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

20 AT A CAR RENTAL LOT - MARSEILLE - SUNSHINE

20

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

MAX
(squeezing in)
Dammit, Gemma!

1 EXT. ROAD - FREEWAY N7 - DAY

21

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

09/19/2005 14A.

INSIDE

Max doesn't notice outside, he's struggling with the GPS as it repeats itself.

GPS VOICE (O.S.)
*Bonjour et bienvenue. Ca c'est la
systeme du position globale.*

Max stabs at the control panel in frustration.

MAX
(shouting)
English, please!

22

EXT. BEAUTIFUL ROAD WITH MAJESTIC TREES - DAY

22

Max's car toddles around the bend.

INSIDE

Max drives. Eyes on road. Ear to phone.

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

INT. LONDON - LAWTON BROTHERS - SAME

23

Kenny sits there, in Max's chair, feet on the desk. He hangs
up.

KENNY
How'd he know that?
Glances round the room for hidden cameras...

EXT. ROAD - MOVING

24

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

MAX
LANCE ARMSTRONG!

They all finger back, etc...

25 EXT. HIGH TECH FLOWER STALL - DAY

25

London. Raining. Gemma is buying tulips with a friend. Her phone rings.

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

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

5 EXT. PROVENCE PANORAMA - DAY

26

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

V.O., then cut into Max.

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

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

EXT. LONDON - SAME

27

Gemma studying her Treo.

*

GEMMA

Turn left. That'll put you back on
the N7. If you really motor you'll
still make your appointment...

EXT. WIDE SHOT - PROVENCE - SAME 28

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

29 EXT. LONDON - TRENDY CAFE - MINUTES LATER 29

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

GEMMA
Mission control?

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

Max stands outside his car, surveying his problem.

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

*
*

EXT. TRENDY CAFE - SAME 30A

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

30B EXT. ROAD - SAME 30B

His head turns to see--

MAX
Your replacement.

A BRAYING DONKEY BLOCKING HIS PATH.

31 EXT. PROVENCE - RURAL ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON 31

Max, now seriously irritated...

GPS VOICE
...avancez...avancez...tournez a droite a 100 metres...

Max passes a driveway with twin pillars. A faded bronze plaque: 'CHATEAU LA SIROQUE.' He stops, backs up the car, and stares at the sign. This is it.

EXT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE ESTATE - LATE AFTERNOON 32

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

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

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

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

DUFLOT

Il est arrive...

EXT. COTTAGE - FAR END OF THE VINEYARD - ESTABLISHING 32A

Smoke drifts from the chimney...

INT. COTTAGE - SAME 32B

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

MADAME DUFLOT

(warning)

Be nice, Francis. Don't go with a face like a boot, go with a smile.

32C EXT. BASTIDE - DRIVEWAY 32C

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

*

33 INT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - ENTRY - LATE AFTERNOON 33

A key rattles in the door -- CLICK -- Magic hour sunlight spills in, framing Max in the doorway. He breathes a wave of nostalgia. The old, familiar smell.

MAX
 Halloo? 'Allo?
 (then; experimentally)
 Uncle Henry?

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

34 INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

34

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

35 EXT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - GARDEN - SAME

35

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

AT THE POOL

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

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

36 EXT. TENNIS COURT - SECONDS LATER

36

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

UNCLE HENRY VOICE
 Match point, Max!

WE ARE NOW IN A FLASHBACK...

MAX'S POV - ON HIS LEFT AT THE FAR END

37

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

MAX'S POV - ON HIS LEFT

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

YOUNG MAX

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

UNCLE HENRY

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

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

UNCLE HENRY

Ace! Game, set, match!

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

YOUNG MAX

YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS!

*

Uncle Henry continues to gloat...without mercy.

YOUNG MAX

You don't have to rub it in!

UNCLE HENRY

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

YOUNG MAX

Because I lost.

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

UNCLE HENRY

Max...a man should acknowledge his losses as gracefully as he celebrates his victories...

(goadng)

Now give us a jig...for your old Uncle's sake...

Following orders, Young Max makes a half-hearted attempt to dance around the court.

UNCLE HENRY

Try harder, Max-a-million! Focus!
Arms up in triumph!
(not happy with his
performance)
Dance boy -- don't shimmy like an
Italian!

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

MAX

This is stupid.

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

UNCLE HENRY

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

THE PRESENT.

EXT. VINEYARD - LATER

38

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

OFFSCREEN VOICE

Chickenshit...

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

DUFLOT

It is the only thing for them.

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

MAX

Monsieur Duflot? My God,
you've...uh...matured.

DUFLOT

C'est vrai. The floods of '78.
The Mistral of '86. Fanleaf
disease in '93.

(MORE)

DUFLOT (cont'd)

With each vintage I have corked
away another year of my youth. But
still, I have my wife Ludivine, and
my dog Tati, who is loyal,
affectionate, and...

MAX

...blue....

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

DUFLOT

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

MAX

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

DUFLOT

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

MAX

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

DUFLOT

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

MAX

If you insist. Well... *Bon nuit,*
Dufлот.

DUFLOT

A demain.

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

Dufлот gestures with a smile, then disappears like a ghost in
the gloaming, as we...

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

39

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

MAX

Ah...*La Siroque*.

40

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S STUDY - MINUTES LATER

40

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

NOEL COWARD

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

MAX

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

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

MAX

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

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

MAX

Well, that was honest...

He opens a window and spits it out.

40A

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - LATER

40A

Max stands in only his socks and boxers, scrubbing the tomato stain out of his dress shirt. Outside, there is a chorus of hearty ribbiting. He remembers and smiles to himself.

MAX
(affectionately)
Frogs.

Max keeps scrubbing, enjoying the moment more than even he knows...

41 INT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - STAIRWELL - MORNING 41

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

42 INT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - KITCHEN 42

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

MAX
Coffee, coffee, coffee... Shite.

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

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

MAX
Madame Duflot.

MADAME DUFLOT
Ah, Maxie, Maxie, Maxie!

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

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

43 EXT. GARDEN - AT THE CHESS TABLE - MOMENTS LATER 43

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

MADAME DUFLLOT

Bon appetit.

Coffee. Croissants. Jam. Butter. Then, she 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!

RING-VIBRATE! His Treo goes off. *

MAX

Morning, Gemma.

GEMMA (O.S.)

Enjoying yourself?

MAX

As bereavements go?

44 INT. LAWTON BROTHERS OFFICE - DAY

44

GEMMA

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

MAX (O.S.)

What?

GEMMA

(reading)

"The FSA today launched an official inquiry into recent Lawton Brothers trade activity..."

MAX (O.S.)

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

GEMMA

Pepper doesn't think so.

Max stops dead.

MAX (O.S.)

(ripple of fear)

Nigel?

GEMMA

Sir Nigel. He wants a sit down
with you. 5 o'clock this
afternoon.

MAX (O.S.)

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

GEMMA

A little over an hour from now.

MAX (O.S.)

My time or your time?

Gemma shakes her head. Oh shit, she forgot.

GEMMA

Oops.

OMITTED

45

EXT. BASTIDE - DRIVEWAY - LATER

46

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

CHARLIE (O.S.)

So how's *La Maison*? Is it
smashing?

MAX

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

EXT. LONDON TOWNHOUSE - DAY

47

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

CHARLIE

We don't say shabby, Max. We say
"filled with the patina of a bygone
era." What about the plonk?

MAX (O.S.)

Bouquet of wet dog. Hits the
palate like a razor blade, with the
finishing hints of awful.

CHARLIE

One thing we're going to need for sure is an oenologue. Test the vines, take soil samples, things of that sort. Ask around, there must be a couple not far from you. Oh -- and few sexy snaps wouldn't hurt either...you know, to get the punters clamoring...

48

ON THE SAME ROAD - FAR AHEAD OF MAX

48

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

INSIDE MAX'S SMART CAR

CHARLIE (O.S.)

There's an e-mail address to send them to...

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

MAX

Okay. Shoot.

CHARLIE

PROVENCELISTINGS@BROADBENTPROPERTIE
S.ENG .

*
*

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

MAX

Hold on. Shite.

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

INSIDE SMART CAR

Max grabs the Treo and finishes entering the address, oblivious to everything.

*

09/19/2005 27A.

50 OMITTED

49-50

EXT. VILLAGE STREET - DAY

51

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

INT. NOTAIRE'S OFFICE - RECEPTION - MORNING

52

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

RECEPTIONIST

Qui?

MAX

Auzet?

INT. NOTAIRE'S OFFICE - DAY

53

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

NATHALIE

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

(noticing he's fixating on her tatoos)

Mr. Skinner?

MAX

Hmmm?

(snaps out)

Sorry.

Max signs the paperwork in front of him.

*

NATHALIE

In the arrangement, the *vigneron* makes the wine, the estate owner maintains the property. *C'est simple*. The proceeds of the wine are then shared equally. This is how your uncle and Monsieur Duflot worked for over thirty years. Naturally Monsieur Duflot will be anxious as to your intentions.

MAX

(businesslike)

I can speed this all up. I have no plans to become a vintner.

NATHALIE

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

MAX

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

She looks up. Removes her glasses.

NATHALIE

Henri would approve of this?

Max smiles a little to himself.

MAX

Tell me, how well did you know my Uncle?

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

MAX

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

NATHALIE

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

MAX

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

(MORE)

09/19/2005 29A.

MAX(cont'd)

(shifting)

Now on an entirely different note,
I wonder if you might help me find
an...oenologue?

AUZET

On this, I will have to get back to you. *

MAX

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

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

MAX

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

AUZET

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

54

INT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - BEDROOM - DAY

54

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

OMITTED

55

56

EXT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - FRONT - DAY

56

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

DUFLOT

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

MAX

News travels fast.

He moves toward his car...

DUFLOT

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

MAX

If he meant that, he might have taken the time to say so in a proper will. But he didn't.

DUFLOT

You know, *Henri* was not English the way you are! He was a man of secrets. A man of passions. He did not write things down.

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

DUFLOT

You would take me away from my vines?!

MAX

They're my vines, Duflot.

DUFLOT

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

MAX

Listen, Duflot...

(gentle touch)

Francis. When I've sold the property, I intend to make you a handsome settlement...

DUFLOT

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

Max is truly baffled.

DUFLOT

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

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

MAX

Afraid so.

He starts the car.

09/19/2005 31A.

MAX
I'll be in touch.

DUFLOT

(calls out after him)

This is not over! No! Ou on a la terre, on a la guerre! (Where there is land, there is war.)

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

MAX

Leaving now.

GEMMA (O.S.)

Good. Sir Nigel is making a special trip. Everything all right?

MAX

No, it was just... Nothing.

GEMMA (O.S.)

Did you get the photos for Charlie?

MAX

Dammit!

Max hangs up, slams on the brakes.

EXT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - GARDEN - DAY

57

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

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

MAX

What?!

GEMMA (O.S.)

Get in the car!

MAX

(re: his camera-phone)

Get off my camera, Gemma!

He hangs up and steps up on the diving board to line up a shot. He walks out farther on the board to get a better angle, then -- CLICK! CRACK! THE DIVING BOARD SNAPS. HIS PHONE GOES FLYING.

09/19/2005 32A.

Max plummet from sight. WE PUSH DOWN TO DISCOVER --

IN THE POOL - Max rolls over on mud and leaves, wincing, gets to his feet. Realizing he's okay, he laughs at himself and shakes off the pain. As he looks around, his face drops. No shallow end. Smooth steep walls.

Max leaps for the lip of the pool. Misses by inches. Tries again. No dice. Stuck. Muddy.

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

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

MAX

Oh, please -- come to papa.

58 INT. LAWTON BROTHERS OFFICE - DAY

58

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

GEMMA

(into phone)

Where are you, you tosser?

59 EXT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - IN THE POOL

59

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

MAX

Aaargh! Call back! C'mon Gemma!

0 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

60

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

1 EXT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - A BIT LATER

61

Fanny raps on the front door. Pissed. Waits. No response. Distant expletives coming from the back...

EXT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - GARDEN

62

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

WHERE SHE FINDS

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

MAX

Hello.

FANNY

Qu'est-ce que vous faites?

MAX

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

FANNY

Ah. You are a 'ros beef?

MAX

Oui. *Anglais, stupide.*

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

MAX

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

FANNY

Is that your car out front?

MAX

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

FANNY

Can you swim?

MAX

Not in a foot of shit.

FANNY

Bon.

She disappears from his view.

MAX
(To himself)
Hello? 'Allo?

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

MAX
Holy crap!

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

2A EXT. LONDON AIRPORT

62A

Max's DRIVER stands as the last "arrival" passengers dribble out...He dials his cell phone.

CUT TO:

3 INT. LAWTON BROTHERS OFFICE

62B

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

POV Gemma. Glamorous board room. Sir Nigel Pepper is sitting in the boardroom waiting with the *Financial Times*. Gemma approaches gingerly and enters.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. POOL - LATER

63

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

MAX
Yes, Gemma, I know, I know.

CUT TO:

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

MAX

'Why do you like the desert,
Colonel Lawrence?'

(in flawless O'Toole)

'I like it because it's clean.'

CUT TO:

65 DESERTED POOL. No Max. Has he drowned? Suddenly, from the 65 depths, Max launches: reaching full stretch...he misses the lip by a centimeter. Dives down, launches again: got it! His fingers strain and he hauls, ravaged and soaking but free.

66 INT. LONDON TAXI - DUSK

66

Ring... Gemma picks up the phone.

GEMMA

You better be in prison.

MAX (O.S.)

Tell him I'm sorry, I can explain.

GEMMA

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

67 INT./EXT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - BACK TERRACE DOOR - NIGHT 67

Max, dripping, stripping off his wet things.

MAX

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

GEMMA (O.S.)

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

MAX

What?!

GEMMA (O.S.)

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

Max's face goes white.

MAX

What does he expect me to do for a week?

GEMMA (O.S.)

Take a holiday.

MAX

Christ he didn't say that did he?

GEMMA (O.S.)

No, I just did.

MAX

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

PULL BACK TO REVEAL...

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

INT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

68

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

THREE HOURS LATER

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

MAX

Frogs...

69 EXT. CHATEAU LA SIROQUE - EARLY MORNING

69

The vineyard at daybreak.

69A INT. KITCHEN - SAME

69A

Madame Duflot is dutifully washing Max's suit by hand, suds and all. Pulls it out. Rings it out.

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - LATER

70

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

MAX

Holy shit!

70A INT. STAIRWELL - SAME

70A

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

70B INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - SAME

70B

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

MADAME DUFLOT

Lavande!? Lavande!?

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

MADAME DUFLOT

Lavande!

She firmly places it back on the window sill.

70C INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - LATER

70C

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

71 INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

71

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

CHARLIE'S VOICE (O.S.)

Back in blighty mon ami?...

INT. HALLWAY - MORNING

71A

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

MAX

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

71B

INT. BASEMENT FLAT IN FULHAM - SAME

71B

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

CHARLIE

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

MAX

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

CHARLIE'S VOICE

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

71C

INT. TOP CORRIDOR - MORNING

71C

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

MAX

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

71D

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME

71D

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

CHARLIE

You sure?

MAX

No problem at all, Charlie.

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

71E INT. CELLAR STAIRCASE - SAME

71E

MAX

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

CHARLIE'S VOICE

How bad can it be?

Max rummaging through bottles on dusty shelves.

MAX

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

CHARLIE'S VOICE

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

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

72 INT. GARAGE - DAY

72

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

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

MAX

You dirty old bugger.

72A EXT. DRIVEWAY - LATER

72A

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

INT. GARAGE - SECONDS LATER

72B

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

MAX

What the hell..?

72C

EXT. OUTSIDE LE CAVE - DAY

72C

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

MAX

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

DUFLOT

C'est moi. It is my paintbrush.

Silence.

MAX

That's the only paintbrush in the house.

DUFLOT

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

Max refuses to be beaten. Gets his wallet out.

MAX

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

Duflot doesn't react.

MAX

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

Impasse. Duflot munches his breakfast.

09/19/2005 41A.

MAX
(leveling)
What do you want, Duflot?

Duflot stands.

DUFLOT

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

Max doesn't blink. He regards his opponent.

MAX

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

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

DUFLOT

A Frenchman's hand is his word.

Max spits a bigger hock into his own palm.

MAX

An Englishman's word is his bond.

They shake, spit merging.

DUFLOT

Concorde.

MAX

Deal.

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

MAX

Frog Tosspot.

DUFLOT

English prick.

BEGIN REPAIR MONTAGE

72D EXT. BASTIDE - BACK GARDEN - NEXT MORNING

72D

Cigarette dangling from his mouth, Dufлот is pruning an
overgrown hedge with a vine sickle.

09/19/2005 42A.

A broken chair comes flying out of a top window, crashing to the ground, just missing him. Max sticks his head out, holding back a smile.

EXT. POOL - NEXT MORNING

72E

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

72F

INT. HENRY'S BEDROOM - DAY

72F

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

72G

INT. SERVANTS QUARTERS - LATER

72G

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

72H

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

72H

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

MAX
(softly)
Oh wow.

72I

FLASHBACK - RAINY DAY

72I

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

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

UNCLE HENRY
(loud; calmly)
Wide...

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

MAX
Howz that!

INT. TOP OF STAIRCASE - DAY

72J

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

DUFLOT

It will not last a month.

MAX

That's someone else's problem.

He slaps on another coat.

MADAME DUFLOT (O.S.)

Monsieur Max!

MAX'S POV - DOWN THE AIRSHAFT

Madame Dufлот stares up, looking uneasy.

MADAME DUFLOT

There is...a person.

MAX

A person?

MADAME DUFLOT

(motioning)

At the door.

73 INT. CHATEAU LE SIROQUE - ENTRYWAY

73

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

BLONDE GIRL

(perfect French)

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

She smiles, flashing her blindingly white teeth.

MAX

The only country that issues teeth like that is America.

09/19/2005 44A.

BLONDE GIRL
Oh, you speak English?

MAX
Like a native.

BLONDE GIRL

My name's Christie Roberts...I'm looking for Mr. Skinner.

MAX

And you have found him.

CHRISTIE

(chuckles)

Impossible, you're way too young.

MAX

(sexual innuendo)

Funny, I was just thinking the same about you.

CHRISTIE

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

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

MADAME DUFLLOT (O.S.)

She has *Henri's* nose!

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

MAX

That's your Mum?

CHRISTIE

(proudly)

In all her Flashdance-glory...

(excited)

So is he around?

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

MAX

You don't know?

CHRISTIE

Know what?

MAX

Oh. Right.
(pinches his nose)
Uh. Look.

He sighs, looks at her for some time.

MAX

Sorry I've forgotten your name.

CHRISTIE

It's Christie.

MAX

Christie. Look Christie...

CHRISTIE

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

Max stops. Slightly impressed at her intuition.

MAX

A month ago.

Christie is crestfallen. Eyes welling up.

MAX

Cup of tea?

74 EXT. BASTIDE - MINUTES LATER

74

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

MAX

So... California?

CHRISTIE

(sadly)

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

(MORE)

CHRISTIE (cont'd)

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

(sighs)

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

As Christie's eyes well up again--

MAX

I think I'll get something stronger.

75 EXT. MAX'S POV FROM ABOVE - MINUTES LATER

75

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

75A INT. UNCLE HENRY'S STUDY - TERRACE - SAME

75A

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

CHARLIE (O.S.)

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

MAX

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

CHARLIE

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

76 EXT. BASTIDE - CHESS TABLE - MINUTES LATER

76

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

MAX

(looks at watch)

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

She stuffs the rest of the sandwich in her mouth.

09/19/2005 47A.

CHRISTIE

(gameily; standing)

No prob. I booked a youth hostel
in town...just in case the old man
was schitzo.

(MORE)

CHRISTIE (cont'd)

You mind dropping me? I've really gotta get out of these clothes.

MAX

Why not get out of your clothes here? We've got tons of space... Rooms to spare. Clean up. Have yourself a shower. I'll be back in no time...

(loud)

Madame Dulfot! A guest!

CHRISTIE

Wow, you sure?

MAX

Of course.

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

77 INT. MAITRE AUZET'S OFFICE - A BIT LATER

77

Max paces the office, apoplectic. Auzet sits behind her desk, studying the photo of Henry and Christie's Mom.

MAX

But she never even met my Uncle!

*

AUZET

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

MAX

Ridiculous! She could be an imposter.

AUZET

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

*
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MAX

Dig the old boy up?! Bollocks you will!

AUZET

Mr. Skinner, your Uncle Henri was cremated.

MAX

(off the hook; relieved)

That's right... Great.

AUZET

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

MAX

(scheming)

Suppose I was to sell the place...before she filed a claim?

AUZET

Legally, she could invalidate a sale, even after the transfer of title.

(Max, at wits end)

But this is all assuming the girl wishes to make a claim. Perhaps her intentions are harmless? My advice is to treat her with the utmost respect and hope she'll be on her way... French courts have a way of favoring the lesser dog; don't make her one.

MAX

Courts?

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78

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

78

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

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

MAX

Hell-bitch...!

MOVING WITH FANNY

09/19/2005 49aA.

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

MOVING WITH MAX

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

MAX

Joan of Arc.

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

FANNY

Ah Jacques Cousteau.

*
*
*
*
*

She walks straight past him, almost pushing him out the way.

MAX

You tried to drown me.

FANNY

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

MAX

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

FANNY

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

*

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

FANNY

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

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

MAX

My God. She's fantastic.

79

EXT. GARDEN - LATER

79

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

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CHRISTIE (O.S.)

Hey Max!

Max looks up.

MAX'S POV - THIRD FLOOR

80

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

CHRISTIE

(earnest)

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

*
*

MAX

(dryly)

It is Cezanne country.

*

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

*
*

HARD CUT TO:

81-84 OMITTED

81-84

EXT. TENNIS COURT - MINUTES LATER

85

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

MAX

(cool)

Duflot...? This afternoon...in town...there was a--

*

DUFLOT

Her name is Fanny Chenal.

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

DUFLOT

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

*
*

Max is impressed by Dulfot's insight.

DUFLOT

But you deserve special credit.

*
*

Oh? Why? MAX

*
*

DUFLOT

You are now the town hero for
making her show her *derriere*.

MAX

Bloody hell, news travels fast.

Dulfot carries on rolling.

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

MAX

She grew up here, didn't she?

DUFLOT

Who?

MAX

Fanny.

DUFLOT

I believe so, yes.

MAX

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

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

DUFLOT

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

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

DUFLOT

Max, recall what Proust said: 'Leave pretty women to men without imagination.'

MAX

I'm a banker, Dufplot. I have no imagination.

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

MAX

Fred Perry.

Dufplot smiles like a crocodile and tips his white visor.

DUFLOT

Henri Lacoste.

OMITTED

86 *

HARD CUT TO:

87

TENNIS COURT - WIDE SHOT

87

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

MAX

Match point, mate.

*
*

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

DUFLOT

Bon.

Duflot walks off, with a sharp command--

DUFLOT

PAPA! TATI!

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

88 INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

88

Max showers off.

MADAME DUFLOT

MONSIEUR MAX!

(Max is startled by a dinner gong)

Diner!

*
*

89 OMITTED

89

90 INT. DINING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

90

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

MAX

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

Maybe.

MADAME DUFLOT

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

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

INT. WINE CAVE - EVENING

91

Max scans the rack of wine...so many choices. Nothing seems to strike his fancy...until he hones in on one of the unlabeled bottles of *Le Coin Perdu*. He snaps it up...

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE
Psst... Max-a-million. Up here.

MAX'S POV - ABOVE HIM

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

91A WE ARE NOW IN A FLASHBACK. MAX CLIMBS UP THE LADDER, 91A
FOLLOWING RIGHT BEHIND HIS YOUNGER SELF... HE WATCHES YOUNG
MAX TAKE HIS PLACE NEXT TO UNCLE HENRY, WHO STANDS, ARMS
AKIMBO, STARING DOWN INTO THE MACERATING VAT OF WINE...
UNCLE HENRY WEARS A STRAW HAT, WITH A RING OF BURNING CANDLES
ATTACHED TO IT. THE 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 Duflot guy
explained it to me.

09/19/2005 54A.

UNCLE HENRY

Well done. Proves the adage that
wisdom can be found in the most
unlikely places.

(MORE)

UNCLE HENRY (cont'd)

To watch Duflot on bended knee,
doing something as simple as
weeding his soil... there's a
magnificent poetry in his devotion
to each and every grape. Perhaps
he'll inspire you to find devotion
in what you do for a living
someday?

YOUNG MAX

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

UNCLE HENRY

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

YOUNG MAX

What's the most important part--

UNCLE HENRY

(cutting in)
--Timing.

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PRESENT. Max chuckles, as the reverie fades away.

INT. BASTIDE - KITCHEN - MINUTES LATER

92

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

CHRISTIE

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

MAX

It's bloody awful.

CHRISTIE

So you know?

MAX

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

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

MAX

Not bad.

09/19/2005 55aA.

Christie swirls, sniffs, sips, trills, and swallows.

CHRISTIE

Mmmm. Formidable...

(tastes again)

It's extraordinary. Like a
Bordeaux... only velvet rather than
wool...

MAX

Look who knows a thing or two about
wine...

CHRISTIE

In Napa, we're known to gargle and spit on occasion...

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

CHRISTIE

Is this made here...on the estate?

MAX

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

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

CHRISTIE

Different bottles... *

(holds up the corks) *

Same corks... *

(tastes *Le Coin*)

Completely different taste...

A little mystery, isn't it?

MAX

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

CHRISTIE

How so?

MAX

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

CHRISTIE

Are they good memories?

MAX

No... They're grand... *

(nostalgic)

Henry used to say: "Max, there's nowhere else in the world where you can keep busy doing so little and enjoy it so much."

Max looks at his watch.

09/19/2005 56aA.

MAX

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

CHRISTIE

Second time in one day. Sounds to
me like you've found yourself a
girl.

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

CHRISTIE

(re: the bottle)

For research... *Bonsoir*, cuz.

MAX

Bonsoir, Christie.

Christie heads upstairs. Max can't help himself; his eyes follow her ass.

93 INT. CAR - MOVING - MINUTES LATER 93

On the phone with Charlie.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
Hello?

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

CHARLIE
Only if she's ugly.

94 EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT 94

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

MAX'S POV - ACROSS THE STREET

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

95 EXT. RENAISSANCE CAFE - SAME 95

The place is packed and frantically busy. Fanny buzzes around the restaurant, placating diners who haven't received their entrees yet, then assuaging patrons who haven't been seated yet... She has to brush past Max.

MAX

Your food must be terrific because
the service is shite.

She looks back.

FANNY

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

MAX

(as she passes)

Where are all your waiters?

FANNY

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

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

IN THE KITCHEN

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

THE DINING ROOM

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

MAX

Relax. I've done this before.

FANNY

Where?

He stops.

MAX

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

A desperate chef rings a service bell and balances two
beautifully presented confections on top of a *bouef en*
croute. She has no choice. She grabs both plates and
thrusts them into Max's hands.

FANNY

Okay, you can serve. But if there are any complaints, remember: in France, the customer is always wrong... Table six.

And off they go, in different directions, commencing:

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

MAX

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

AMERICAN MAN

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

Max arrives to greet an AMERICAN COUPLE.

AMERICAN MAN

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

Max snaps the menus from their hands.

MAX

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

Fanny watches from afar, amused.

96

INT. RENAISSANCE CAFE - LATER

96

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

Fanny comes out.

FANNY

Here are your tips... Thank you
for your help. You're fired.

She moves off to stack chairs...

MAX

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

FANNY

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

MAX

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

FANNY

If we did, I hope I was unbearable.

MAX

Look, I know it's late but I was
thinking, maybe there was someplace
I could spend my hard-earned tips
on a drink or two, to say sorry.

(she looks at him,
sternly)

What?

FANNY

Are you asking me on a date?

MAX

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

FANNY

I'm not interested.

MAX

(laughing)

Why not?

FANNY

Because I don't like you.

09/19/2005 60aA.

She goes back in. Max is impressed. Produces a half-bottle of leftover red wine from beneath the table, and decides to sit things out.

*
*
*

EXT. RENAISSANCE CAFE - HOURS LATER - DARK

97 *

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

MAX

(calling out) *

Exactly what is it about me that you don't like? *

FANNY *

The fact that you asked. *

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

FANNY

Saturday night. 8:00 at the Grand Chateau. Don't be late. *

Max smiles...and watches her pull out. *

EXT. BASTIDE - NEXT MORNING

98

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

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

Max charges into the room.

MAX
Lavande! Lavdande!

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

MAX
Lavande!

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S STUDY - LATER

98A

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

*
*

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

98B FLASHBACK. Uncle Henry on the couch, glass of wine on his stomach. At the desk is Young Max, gripping the SAME PEN, writing in Henry's checkbook, forging his handwriting.

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

UNCLE HENRY
How much?

YOUNG MAX
87 francs.

UNCLE HENRY
(sighs)
Sign!

09/19/2005 61A.

Using Uncle Henry's real signature as a guide, Young Max
flips it upside down, and copies the scrawl...

YOUNG MAX
H-e-n-r-y...S-k-i-n-n-e-r.

UNCLE HENRY
Who else, who else...?

YOUNG MAX
(rummaging through bills)
The mechanic?

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

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

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

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S STUDY - PRESENT

99

Max puts the pen back, wistfully.

MAX
(whispers)
You could be me.

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

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

MADAME DUFЛОT
He was an excellent dancer.

Max smiles. He thought so.

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

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

MADAME DUFLOT

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

Madame Duflot exits in a frantic rush.

100

EXT. VINEYARD - MORNING

100

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

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

A SMALL SHED

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

DUFLOT (O.S.)

He is called...Syrah.

Christie turns. Duflot steps out of the vines.

CHRISTIE

(in flawless French)

Named after a grape? How appropriate.

DUFLOT

Ah, vous parlez francais?

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

DUFLOT

Francis Duflot, vigneron.

CHRISTIE

Christie Roberts, illegitimate daughter.

Duflot studies the pretty, young girl's face. The loss of Henry comes rushing back -- if only for a wounded moment...

DUFLOT

The resemblance to Henry is
unmistakable...

(looks more closely)

The nose!

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

CHRISTIE

You knew him well?

DUFLOT

(nodding)

For twenty-three years I toiled
side-by-side with your father.

Even now...

(points up to heaven;
smiles)

...he works from there...

(points to the soil)

...and I from here.

She strokes the pony.

DUFLOT

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

CHRISTIE

I've noticed. Many of them are
withered...

(glancing around)

...except here.

DUFLOT

(re: the hectare)

Ici? It is *catastrophic!* Nothing
but rocks and grief.

CHRISTIE

(points; naively)

They're limestones. They absorb
sunlight, then radiate heat at
night to keep the vines warm.

Off his look of surprise.

CHRISTIE

(grinning disarmingly)

I'm a wine brat. Spent my summers
working at a vineyard in
California.

DUFLOT

They do not make wine in California, they make Hawaiian Punch.

CHRISTIE

Mondavi might argue that one.

DUFLOT

Perhaps Henry's daughter would be interested in a personal tour of the vines?

(puts his arm around her)

If we are lucky, his spirit will join us...

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

DUFLOT

(in French)

Suivez-moi. This way...

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

101 INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - DUSK 101

Django Reinhart's "Time on My Hands" spills from the house.

102 EXT. VINEYARD - DUSK 102

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

MAX

What's happening, Charlie?

CHARLIE (O.S.)

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

MAX

Terrific. I'll alert the staff.

EXT. DUFLOT'S COTTAGE - EVENING

103

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

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

DUFLOT

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

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

104

OMITTED

104

*

INT. KITCHEN - SECONDS LATER

105

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

MADAME DUFLOT

Maxie, Maxie, Maxie...welcome!

Max hands her the roses.

MADAME DUFLOT

Ah, merci! Tres jolie!

106

EXT. TERRACE - EVENING

106

Finally, Duflot leads Max out to a small tiled terrace, with a stunning view of the vineyard and the Luberon Valley. Surprise -- Christie's here too, standing by the rail, sipping a Pastis. She looks gorgeous, her hair swept up and a grown-up dress kissing her body. On a trolley, is a mess of appetizers, including a thick earthenware terrine of thrush pate, with the bird's beak protruding from the dark meat.

*
*
*
*

DUFLLOT

I hope you do not mind, I took the
liberty of inviting Henri's
daughter to join us...

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

DUFLLOT

(moves off)

Un moment. I will get you a
Pastis.

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

CHRISTIE

Bonjour cuz.

Kiss, kiss, kiss.

MAX

I see you've managed to ingratiate
yourself with the help.

(re: sexy dress)

Where'd you get the Halston? *

CHRISTIE

Dad's closet...and actually it's a
Mary Quant. *

MAX

(none the wiser; re: the
woman who left the dress
behind) *

I wonder what she wore home. *

TIME CUT *

EXT. DINING VERANDA - LATER

107

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

DUFLOT

A simple meal...after a day's work
in the fields...

(points to each dish)

Caviar d'aubergine... Cold puree
of eggplant... Headless larks...

CHRISTIE

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

*
*
*

DUFLOT

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

MAX

Why would one have it any other
way?

Dufлот tries to pour wine for Papa, but Papa rudely refuses in an unintelligible language, covering his glass with his hand, which gets drenched. He abruptly gets up and walks to the kitchen.

MADAME DUFLOT

(laughing)
Papa only speaks Provencal; the
language of Mistral.

DUFLOT

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

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

DUFLOT

Non, Papa! Non!

PAPA

Le Coin, Le Coin!

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

DUFLOT

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

MAX

Vin de garage?

*

CHRISTIE

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

*

*

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

DUFLOT

It is overrated.

*

*

CHRISTIE

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

*

*

*

*

*

(MORE)

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CHRISTIE(cont'd)

It changes hands among collectors,
and still, nobody has any idea
where it's grown, or who makes it.

*
*
*

Duflot locks the bottle in a cabinet.

DUFLOT
It is time for *fromage*.

*
*

TIME CUT

*

108 INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

108

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

*

CHRISTIE
What is it?

DUFLOT
Marc de Provence. I made it
myself.

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

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

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

MAX
Besides that?

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

MAX
Come on, there must be something,
anything -- besides that lovely
snout -- that can help corroborate
her claim...?
(to all) *
I mean, did Henry ever discuss *
California? Or a woman in *
California? Any drunken moments of *
candor where he mentioned *
offspring? I mean, seriously, the *
last person Henry would breed with *
is an American. *

Duflot shrugs, interrupting. *

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

All eyes turn to Christie, who somehow barely maintains her
dignity. Max now openly jealous. She stands, as if about to
make an important announcement, and holds onto the table for
balance. *

CHRISTIE

(hurt)

Max, all I care about is learning
about my father...

(MORE)

*

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CHRISTIE(cont'd)

This is my chance to find out who
made me...and I don't give a rat's
ass if you believe who I am or
not...

And with that:

CHRISTIE

Monsieur and Madame Dulfot. Thank
you for a lovely evening.

MADAME DUFLOT

Papa will walk you back.

CHRISTIE

No, merci. The vines will guide me
home.

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

DUFLOT

(friendly)

Max, it is time to talk business.
You and I. Cigars.

*
*
*

109 EXT. TERRACE - SECONDS LATER

109

Max and Dufлот have returned to the terrace with Marc and
Montecristos. Papa is somnambulant in the background.

*

MAX

Partnership? You must be barking
mad.

DUFLOT

(offers a glass; as if an
answer)

More marc?

Max shakes his head.

MAX

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

DUFLOT

(shrugs: *c'est la vie*; but
uncomfortable)

Henry...he was *tres inventif*, he
always found a way.

*
*

MAX

8000 bottles per hectare,
multiplied by 11 hectares, divided
by your wholesale price per case,
with a 30% sell-back ratio, leading
to a pre-tax loss of approximately
\$23,000 euros a year...for ten
years. Inventive, very.
Believable, no.

*
*
*
*
*
*
*
*

DUFLOT

(uncomfortable with Max's
diligence)

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

*
*
*

*
*
*
*
*
*

MAX

My stomach won't take anything
below true market value.

*
*
*

DUFLOT

Max -- I am prepared to invest
everything I have to replant the
vineyard. I offer you 50,000 a
year...without breaking a finger.

*
*
*
*
*

MAX

Duflot, I'm a banker. There's no indication in those records that this vineyard can support that kind of money... Not to mention, my estate agent is coming down tomorrow afternoon to present me with offers. Probably nothing less than two to three million euros. Two mil is life-changing, 50K, before tax, is loose change...

Max senses Duflot's desperation.

MAX

(soothing)

Francis...I've already given you my word that I'd press the new owners to accept you as an essential part of the whole deal. I'm sorry...

(rising)

Thank you for dinner. *Bonsoir*...

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

PAPA

Asshole.

DUFLOT

Yes, he is.

PAPA

Not him. You.

110 OMITTED 110 *

111 EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - NIGHT - MOVING WITH MAX 111 *

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

MAX
What the hell are you doing?

CHRISTIE
Lost my shoe.

Max considers leaving her there, but then thinks better.

112 EXT. VINEYARD - NIGHT - MINUTES LATER

112

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

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

*
*
*

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

*
*
*

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

*
*
*

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

*
*
*
*
*
*

CHRISTIE
(irritated)
Are you saying she was loose?

*
*
*

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

*
*
*

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

*
*
*
*
*
*

MAX
Yes, it does matter. That's why I want to be sure.

*
*
*

Christie grabs a few grapes as she passes by a vine. Looks at them. *

*

INT. BASTIDE - FOOT OF THE STAIRS - LATER

113

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

CHRISTIE

(mimicking Madame Duflot
as if she heard) *

You know Max, half the aristocrats
in France have *liaisons* with their
cousins. *

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

MAX

Now you're starting to act like
Henry's daughter. *

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

INT. CHRISTIE'S BEDROOM - SAME

114

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

MAX

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

As he heads for the door--

CHRISTIE

Thanks a million, Max-a-million.

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

FADE TO BLACK:

EXT. FRONT COURT - NEXT MORNING 115

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

*
*
*

116 INT. LUSTIG BANK - DAY 116

Amis, Max's nemesis is on the phone.

AMIS

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

117 INT. FRONT COURT - CONTINUOUS 117

MAX

(now alert)

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

AMIS

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

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

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

MAX

Can I help you?

MAN

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

No reaction from Max.

MAN
I was contacted by Nathalie
Auzet...to test the vines.

MAX
(after a beat)
The oenologue?!

MONTAGE SEQUENCE...

118 INT. CAVE - DAY 118

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

MAX *
Gemma. Long time! *

118A INT. LONDON - LAWTON BROTHERS - SAME 118A *

Gemma is on her headset-- *

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

MAX *
Getting comfortable in my absence, *
is he? *

ANGLE ON - KENNY *

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

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

118B INT. CAVE - SAME 118B *

GEMMA *
He's even taking credit for your *
trade this week...telling everyone *
in the office that he was the one *
who gave you the idea. *

MAX
Gemma, if he wasn't a backstabbing
runt, I would have never hired him.

*
*
*

GEMMA
But Max--

*
*

MAX
A tout a l'heure, Gemma.

*
*

Hangs up.

*

MAX
(to Jean-Marie)
Well?

*
*
*

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

*

JEAN-MARIE
Piquette. (Awful.)

119 EXT. VINEYARD - DAY 119

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

JEAN-MARIE
Maladie. (Disease.)

120 EXT. VINEYARD - DAY 120

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

JEAN-MARIE
Pas terrible.

121 EXT. VINEYARD - DAY 121

Jean-Marie scoops up some soil...rubs it in his hands, spits
into his hand and creates a clay-like substance.

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JEAN-MARIE

Fiente.

(then translating)

Chickenshit.

CLOSE SHOT - ON MAX

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

122 EXT. CANOPIED TREE PATH - SECONDS LATER 122

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

123 EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - DAY 123

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

JEAN-MARIE

(arrogant to have his time
wasted)

More like a quarry than a
vineyard...

(kicks some stones)

One might as well try to grow
asparagus in the Sahara...

MAX

Looks very well-kept to me...

(points to grapes)

Why are all those grape bunches on
the ground?

JEAN-MARIE

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

MAX

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

JEAN-MARIE

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

MAX

So then what's the verdict?

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JEAN-MARIE

(officials)

The soil is devoid of even the most
basic *minerales*. The vines
themselves are far too degraded to
produce a respectable grape...

(MORE)

JEAN-MARIE (cont'd)

In summary, it is my professional opinion that -- despite your vigneron's admirable attempt efforts -- this terroir is beyond help... Frankly, you might consider growing potatoes or squash?

(then)

I will have my office fax the report to Miss Auzet's office this afternoon....

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

124 EXT. VINEYARD - MINUTES LATER

124

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

MAX'S POV - AT THE POOL

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

125 EXT. POOL - SECONDS LATER

125

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

MAX

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

CHRISTIE

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

Max snaps the diary out of her hand.

MAX

Christie -- do you want to know about the real Henry Skinner, not the one manufactured by your overactive imagination?

(MORE)

MAX(cont'd)

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

Max is immediately upset with himself for saying this.

CHRISTIE

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

(sweeps her hand across
the estate)

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

(then; standing)
I'll leave tomorrow.

Christie huffs into the house, her back reddening from too
much sun...

Scribbled in green ink in his Uncle's writing it says:
"Alison Roberts. The San Francisco Treat."

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S STUDY - MINUTES LATER

126A *

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

MAX

Charlie...?

CHARLIE'S VOICE

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

MAX

(covering)

At it since daybreak. True sense of accomplishment.

CHARLIE

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

MAX

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

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

CHARLIE

(loudly)

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

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

127 EXT. POOL - A LITTLE BIT LATER

127.

Max and Charlie sit at the chess table. Max has obviously downloaded Charlie on the oenologue's assessment.

CHARLIE

It's a disaster. Your frog wine
man may well have knocked an "f-
you" off our sale price.

*

MAX

(business mode)

Best approach now is to dump the
thing as fast as we can, for as
much as we can... But don't
forget, Duflot's included.

*
*

CHARLIE

I'll do my best...provided, of course, that you cover my travel expenses...and a nominal per diem, say, 100 Euros a day.

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

MAX

You tight-fisted jockey.

CHARLIE

(looking around)

Now then...what's on the agenda?
Steak frites? Bottle of Ricard?
An evening game of bridge?

MAX

Real men don't play bridge,
Charlie. They don't play bridge
and they don't dress like Richard
Attenborough.

(points to his outfit)

Loosen up for God's sake.

Max gets up.

CHARLIE

Where are you going?

MAX

Obligatory! Cultural activity with
an old friend.

CHARLIE

(disappointed)

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

MAX

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

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

128

EXT. VILLAGE - EVENING

128 *

Lots of cars are parked in all conceivable places: on
sidewalks, in driveways, on patios.

*
*

Max maneuvers his Uncle's motorcycle and parks it beneath a massive, dense, plain tree. He looks dapper, in one of his Uncle's concoctions. He climbs off the bike, pulls out a bottle of *Le Coin Perdu* from the pannier, and heads toward the Grand Chateau, as he dials a number... *

*
*
*
*
*

INT. LONDON - LAWTON BROTHERS - SAME

129

Kenny's cellphone rings. He answers.

KENNY
Hello?

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

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

130 EXT. STREET - SAME

130 *

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

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

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

KENNY
Alright, Max.

Kenny hangs up and quickly jumps on the squawk box.

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

131 INT. LUSTIG BANK - AMIS' OFFICE - DAY

131

As a TRADER ducks his head in to inform Amis:

TRADER
Someone's shorting Monday's gilt
issue.

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AMIS
(foaming at the mouth)
Skinner! Not this time, you
miserable sod!

INT. BASTIDE - KITCHEN - EVENING

132

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

CHARLIE

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

CHRISTIE (O.S.)

(weakly)

Anyone there? Hello?

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

CHRISTIE

Anyone! Please!

133

INT. STAIRCASE - SECONDS LATER

133

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

CHRISTIE

Who're you?

CHARLIE

(frozen)

Ch-- Cha-- Char-- Max's friend.

CHRISTIE

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

134

INT. CHRISTIE'S ROOM - SECONDS LATER

134

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

CHARLIE

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

CHRISTIE

California. Born and bred.

CHARLIE

Really? I absolutely adore
Californians. Ask anyone...
(then; to her back)
(MORE)

CHARLIE (cont'd)

Well, luv, right now, your back is approximately the color of a ripe pomegranate.

CHRISTIE

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

CHARLIE

Righty ho! On the job--!

Charlie moves to leave--

CHRISTIE

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

CHARLIE

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

CHRISTIE

Love your accent.

135 INT. STAIRCASE - SAME 135

As he quickly goes down the stairs--

CHARLIE

Love your bum.

136 OMITTED 136 *

137 OMITTED 137 *

138 EXT. CHATEAU - EVENING 138

A lush, grassy field...with old trees anchored to the ground by thick, entangled roots. A flowing water garden ripples beneath the reflection of the dipping summer sun. Ornate candelabras light the area with a flickering glow.

It's a posh crowd, buzzing with talk and laughter. Couples lay on blankets, picnicking with wine and food, surrounding a black Steinway piano, a violin, a cello, and a bass. *

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

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

MAX

(smiling)

Have I mentioned you're a vision?

FANNY

Oui. From the bottom of the pool,
when you were peeking up my skirt.

They kiss three times as Max laughs. *

MAX

(re: food)

Why don't you let me serve?

FANNY

(a warning)

I've already fired you once this
week. Sit. *

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

FANNY

Le Coin Perdu? I've never actually
seen a bottle. *

MAX

You've heard of it? *

FANNY

It's very expensive... Are you
trying to seduce me, Max? *

MAX

I hadn't thought of it. *

FANNY

(smiling)

There's something you should know
about me, Max... I'm very, very
choosy. *

MAX

Well I'm very, very honored. *

FANNY

(challenging)

I'm also very very suspicious. Very
very irrational, and I have a very,
very short temper. *

MAX

Don't promise me an evening of
suspicion and irrational anger if
you can't deliver. I've been hurt
that way before. *

FANNY

I'm also extremely jealous and slow
to forgive. Just so you know.

She serves him canapes.

MAX

Well, this promises to be a lovely
evening.

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

*
*
*
*
*
*
*
*

EXT. VILLAGE - NIGHT

139

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

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

140

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

CHARLIE

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

CHRISTIE

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

CHARLIE

Sinking, is the rumor. Plus, one false step and you're in a canal, being run over by gondolas...
(hard sell)
Now London, on the other hand, has it all...including your own personal tour guide... *Moi*.

CHRISTIE

Uh, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Yes, luv?

CHRISTIE

Hands off my ass.

CHARLIE

(sputtering)
Oh-- Terribly sorry--

141 EXT. CHATEAU - COURTYARD - NIGHT

141

Max and Fanny are swept up in the music... Nature complies with art, and it begins to rain.

This is no ordinary rain, though. In seconds, it's a torrential assault from the heavens. Workers scramble to cover the piano with a tarp, as people scatter to find shelter in the chateau...or in their nearby cars.

142 EXT. TREE - NIGHT

142 *

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

*
*
*

FANNY

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

MAX

How do you know we lost touch?

*

FANNY

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

*
*

MAX

You knew him?

*
*

FANNY

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

*
*
*

Max assumes the worst.

MAX

(anxious)

You and he didn't...rumba--?

*

FANNY

No.

Max, relieved.

FANNY

(just joking)

But of course I tried.

*

Max chuckles.

MAX

Henry was the only person I've ever loved...

*

(melancholy)

And I couldn't even find the time to send the old bugger a postcard.

*

(MORE)

MAX(cont'd)

For the life of me, I can't work
out why I stopped coming here. I
love this place.
(nostalgic)
(MORE)

*
*
*
*

MAX(cont'd)

Henry used to say: "Max-a-million,
there's nowhere else in the world
where you can keep busy doing so
little and enjoy it so much..."

*
*
*
*

Fanny, bemused, watching him.

*

FANNY

You always wore your hair like it
is now, didn't you?

MAX

That's right.

FANNY

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

MAX

(hopeful)

Yes! *

FANNY

(then)

No, I don't remember you.

Max kisses Fanny. *

OMITTED

143 *

OMITTED

144 *

INT. MAX'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

145

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

FADE TO BLACK.

146 EXT. LA SIROQUE - NEXT MORNING

146

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

147 INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - SAME

147

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

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

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

FANNY
(embarrassed)
I must go to work.

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

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

*
*

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

MAX
Devastating sexual technique?

FANNY
(smiles)
No... It is because once you have done what you came here to do, you will not return. For us, there can be no future...there is safety in that, n'est-ce pas?

*
*
*
*

09/19/2005 91A.

Max studies Fanny: obviously she's had some hurtful cataclysm in her romantic past.

MAX

Nothing's preventing us from moving
your cafe to Notting Hill. God
knows London could use a decent
bistro. *

FANNY

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

MAX

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

FANNY

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

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

A EXT. TENNIS COURT - MORNING

147A

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

CHARLIE

Where's your diving board?

MAX

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

CHARLIE

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

Beat.

MAX

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

CHARLIE

I don't blame you, mate, she's a
goddess -- even if she is your
cousin.

MAX
Not Christie, you twat, Fanny.

CHARLIE
Oh.

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

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

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

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

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

MAX
I stole his job.

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

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

Without even looking at it, Max signs the contract.

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

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

Max stands. Then remembers:

MAX

What about Duflot? Make sure they
keep him on.

*
*

CHARLIE
I tried. They said no. *

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

148 EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - DAY 148

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WE ARE BACK THE PRESENT...

149

09/19/2005 94A.

Max is now upon Duflot, who is on his hands and knees,
weeding the soil...

DUFLOT

My whole life, people laughed at me
for singing to my vines... I
explained that, someday, the vines
would sing back...

(beat)

Here, they finally have...

(standing; razor sharp
eyes)

You don't know what you are doing.

MAX

What are you talking about?

DUFLOT

(passionately)

Ici. *Le Coin Perdu.*

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

MAX

That's impossible. The oenologue
said--

DUFLOT

The oenologue was paid to say that!

Max, paralyzed.

DUFLOT

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

MAX

We?

DUFLOT

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

MAX

(dawning on him)

Auzet?!

DUFLOT

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

(MORE)

DUFLOT (cont'd)

And now she is my partner... She
was merely trying to protect our
secret.

*
*
*

Max, aghast.

MAX

Why didn't you tell me about this?
Why didn't you trust me!

DUFLOT

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

MAX

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

DUFLOT

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

Dufлот picks up a stone--

DUFLOT

Here, Max. Here was Henry's f-
you money...

--and lobs it at Max, who catches it.

Abruptly, Duflot walks off... THE CAMERA CLOSES IN ON
 MAX...who stands among the vines. A gentle breeze blows
 across the vineyard, fluttering the leaves...

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

149A *

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

MAX

Where you headed?

CHRISTIE

Not exactly sure.

MAX

At your age, that's the best
 destination...

(then)

How 'bout a lift?

CHRISTIE

(re: small car)

Where would I sit, the glove
 compartment?

Max smiles.

CHRISTIE

I'd rather walk.

MAX

Here--

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

MAX

You never finished.

CHRISTIE

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

MAX

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

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

MAX

Christie?

A long silence...

*

MAX

You do have his nose...

They hold eyes on each other.

MAX

Au revoir...

CHRISTIE

(touched)

Au revoir, cuz.

Max pulls out.

REVERSE SHOT - ON CHRISTIE

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

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE

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

OMITTED

150

151

INT. MARIIGNANE AIRPORT - DAY

151

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

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE

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

152

EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - DAY

152

Duflot wanders through the vines beneath a parasol, deflated. Tati follows, dejected.

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE

Convinced that Death, like all
tradesmen, would be unable to find
my front door...

*
*
*

Madame Duflot appears from the vines and takes her husband's arm, trying to console him.

153 OMITTED 153 *

154 EXT. MARIGNANE AIRPORT - RUNWAY - DAY 154

A jet speeds down the runway...

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE

*...and having always believed wills
to be written invitations to the
reaper, I find myself impelled to
impress upon your kindness...*

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

155 EXT. AVIGNON TRAIN STATION - DAY 155

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

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE

*I have a daughter... Her name is
Christie Roberts. Sadly, we have
never met...*

156 INT. RENAISSANCE CAFE - DAY 156

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

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE

*Her mother's name was Allison.
She was a tour guide at a tiny
vineyard in Northern California.*

157 INT. TGV SPEED TRAIN - SAME 157 *

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

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE

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

158 INT. HEATHROW - DAY

158

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

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE

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

159 EXT. LA SIROQUE - DAY

159

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

CHARLIE

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

(he shakes)

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

MR. BOUFFARD

What sort of wrinkle?

CHARLIE

The American sort.

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE

*Because for me, even in it's
present state, La Siroque is a
place of magic...*

160 INT. TGV SPEED TRAIN - SAME

160

The train rips through the French countryside. Christie opens the envelope. Inside, she finds both photos, as well as Uncle Henry's letter to Max -- which is written in green ink, in a flowing Italianate. She begins to read...

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE
*And it is my heartfelt wish that
Christie should share in that
magic...*

161 INT. MAX'S FLAT - DUSK

161

Max enters the austerity of his hip flat. Puts his keys on a steel counter. Removes Henry's sandals, still covered with Provencal dust and drops them in the trash.

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE
*I like to think of her there...
After all...she and La Siroque are
all I leave behind...*

Then, as an afterthought, he takes them out.

162 INT. TGV SPEED TRAIN - DAY - MOVING 162 *
Christie finishes Uncle Henry's letter, overcome with *
emotion... *

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

163 OMITTED 163 *

INT. LAWTON BROTHERS - MORNING

164

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

BROKER 1

Genghis! Back from the dead!

MAX

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

BROKER 2

Welcome back boss.

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

KENNY (O.S.)

You wanker!

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

*
*

MAX

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

KENNY

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

MAX

(innocently)

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

Gemma falls into stride with him.

GEMMA

Good holiday? You look different.

MAX

Very relaxing thank you, Gemma. Bring me everything I need to read to get me up to date. And a double-espresso.

*
*

GEMMA

On your desk in five...
(with trepidation)
Sir Nigel is waiting for you.

*
*

Max stiffens. She looks genuinely worried.

165 INT. SIR NIGEL'S OFFICE - DAY 165

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

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

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

SIR NIGEL

Van Gogh.

MAX

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

SIR NIGEL

Don't be soft. Its not real. Real one's in my vault. It's a copy. How much? Guess? Go on.

(before he can)

Two hundred grand. For a knock off. Sit.

Max follows orders.

SIR NIGEL

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

MAX

Are those passions or vices?

Sir Nigel explodes.

SIR NIGEL
HAVE I FINISHED TALKING?! When
I've finished talking, that's when
you talk, and it better be good!

Nigel bangs his desk.

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

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

Sir Nigel holds up his hand, stopping him--

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

He slides an envelope across the table.

SIR NIGEL
You've got one hour.

166 INT. HALLWAY - DOWNSTAIRS - MINUTES LATER

166 *

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

GEMMA
Shall I pack my Smurfs?

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

GEMMA
Shit Max... What happened?

He hands her the envelope, unopened. Walks off.

INT. MAX'S OFFICE - MINUTES LATER

167

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

FLASHBACK:

168 OMITTED

168 *

168A EXT. LA SIROQUE - POOL - DUSK - FLASHBACK

168A *

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

UNCLE HENRY

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

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

YOUNG MAX

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

UNCLE HENRY

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

(to Mother; as they go)

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

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

FANNY

Je m'apelle Fanny. Et toi?

Max can barely answer, his face crimson with discomfort.

YOUNG MAX
(eyes down)
Er... Je...m'apelle...Max.

*
*
*

With fearless abandon, Fanny slips off her shorts, and in only panties and a tank top, dives into the pool. She swims underwater, and pops up, right across from Max, her blue eyes sparkling in the dipping summer sun. Then, for no apparent reason, she gives Max his first kiss, then whispers in his ear.

*
*
*
*
*
*

169

INT. MAX'S OFFICE - SAME - PRESENT

169

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

GEMMA

That's a lot of zeros.

*
*

MAX

Or partnership. My choice.

*
*

GEMMA

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

*

MAX

Yeah. Look at him.

GEMMA

Well, what the hell are you gonna do?

INT. SIR NIGEL'S OFFICE - LATER

170

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

The door opens: Nigel enters with an heir of benevolence. *

SIR NIGEL

What's it to be? Money or yoke? *

Max ignores him studying the painting.

MAX

When do you look at it?

SIR NIGEL

What?

Max studies the painting.

MAX

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

SIR NIGEL

What's your point Skinner? Have you made your decision? *

Sir Nigel turns to look at the painting. *

HARD CUT TO:

INT. RENAISSANCE CAFE - DAY

171

CLOSE SHOT - THE VAN GOGH PAINTING

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

172 EXT. RENAISSANCE CAFE - DAY

172

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

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

FANNY

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

A menu lowers. It's Max.

MAX

I think so.

FANNY

(recovering)

Sure you don't need more time? *

MAX

No. I think I know what I want.

FANNY

You're sure?

MAX

Pretty sure.

FANNY

So. What is it to be?

He looks at Fanny for a long time.

MAX

How's the soup?

FANNY

The soup is finished.

MAX

Like my job. *

Fanny lowers her pad, surprised.

*

MAX
(then)
The fish.

*
*
*

FANNY
We've run out.

*
*

MAX
That's like me...with excuses.

*
*

FANNY

Don't waste my time. Choose something we have.

*
*
*

MAX

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

*
*
*
*
*
*

He kisses her.

*

MAX

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

*

FANNY

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

*
*
*
*

MAX

It appears that you do too.

*
*

FANNY

(nodding)

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

They kiss as we...

DISSOLVE TO:

173

EXT. LA SIROQUE - A FEW WEEKS LATER

173

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

EXT. FRONT VINEYARD - SAME 174 *

Vendage! A crew of GYPSY PICKERS carry straw baskets filled with grapes, clipping the grapes off the vines. Tati darts through their legs, chasing a rabbit...

175 EXT. BASTIDE - DAY 175

Max sits on the edge of the wall, watching the pickers do their work, shirt-top opened. He looks a helluva lot like Henry... From inside the house, he can begin to hear THE SOUND OF SCREAMING...

176 EXT. BASTIDE - SAME 176 *

Max sits on the step, listening to Christie and Dufлот in the middle of a titanic, knock-down, drag-out row in the hall. They are bellowing in French, holding some vines. They seem to be fighting over how high, or low, to cut the stems... Dulfot appears in front of Max-- *

DUFLOT *

Max! Thank God you are here! I
will not work for this madperson!
Jamais! Jamais! *

Dufлот steps over to Max, and whispers, conspiratorially: *

DUFLOT *

But I love this woman! *

Dufлот storms off as Christie appears and gives him the finger. Tati barks at Dulfot, and stays with Christie. She turns to Max-- *

CHRISTIE *

I can't deal with this asshole,
Max! He's gotta remember who the
owner is -- me! *

(frustration) *

The French! What's with their
attitude? This morning I'm on the
phone for two hours with the wine
authorities. They're total
crooks... *

MAX *

Want me to soften them up? *

CHRISTIE

You're hired. *

Max continues to sit in the sunshine as Christie turns to go, then pauses. An afterthought: *

CHRISTIE

Oh, by the way, Max, you were running low on green ink, so I bought you some more... *

Paperwork's up in Dad's study. *

He and Christie lock eyes. *

CHRISTIE

You never know...you may need to write a letter or something. *

Then, turns to jog after Duflot. *

CHRISTIE

Tati! *

(calling out) *

Duflot, wait! *

She heads out after Duflot and Tati follows. As, Max's Treo rings. He heads outside. *

MAX

So. How's the sale going?

177

INT. MAX'S APARTMENT - SAME

177

Charlie is in Max's apartment. A couple of large Hip Hoppers are checking it out (like Ali G). Gemma is there too, aloof but patient.

CHARLIE

Flats in this bracket shift in a blink. I'm confident of 1.8. Maybe even 1.9...

GEMMA

(to hip hopper who's feet are now on the coffee table)

Feet off, Jamal.

Jamal complies, politely. Gemma sits down next to him, marginally flirtatious. *

09/19/2005 110aA:

GEMMA
So, you're an actual rapper?

*
*

EXT. BASTIDE - SAME

178

Max watches as Fanny and Madame Duflot periodically enter the frame...placing lunch on the table, adjusting flowers, uncorking wine, etc...

*
*
*

MAX

Bullshit Charlie. I paid 1.3 two
years ago, and I've put two hundred
thou into it. You get me a twenty
five percent yield or I get myself
another estate agent.

179

INT. MAX'S APARTMENT - SAME

179

Charlie smiles warmly. Same old Max.

CHARLIE

You realize, of course, you'll
never last down there.

MAX (O.S.)
You takin' odds on that?

180 EXT. BASTIDE - SAME

180

CHARLIE (O.S.)
And as impossible as it may seem...

Max watches Fanny sway back towards him, her beauty all the more perfect in this moment... She gives him a glass of Rose, tussling his hair, and disappears back inside.

CHARLIE
...the very things you find sexy
and unique now will soon become the
dread of your day-to-day
existence...

MAX
Is that a fact?

CHARLIE
And then, after months of eating,
drinking, sleeping, and bonking,
what have you got to look forward
to? Boredom!

Fanny reappears carrying plates of food, hips swinging back to the lunch table...

CHARLIE
Max, you're my best mate and I'm
telling you: you won't last!

He sips the wine.

MAX
Mmmmm. A good year.
(smiles)
We'll see, Charlie. We'll see.

Max hangs up. Fanny gestures to him to come to the table.
He does.

At a distance, Christie is walking back toward them with Tati. Duflot seems to be following, as Madame Duflot comes out with a giant dish of antipasti.

FANNY
Okay. That tree. It is not a tree
anymore. It's an arbre..

MAX

Arbre.

FANNY

See that *bird*. *C'est L'Oiseau.*

MAX

L'Oiseau.

Tati runs past.

FANNY

That blue dog. *C'est un chien
bleu.*

MAX

Chien bleu.

As they continue, the CAMERA drifts away from them...taking in the garden, and the tennis court, and the pool, and then the vineyard, and then finally, *La Siroque*...just a tiny piece of *terroir* in a very big world.

FIN