

THE FRENCH DISPATCH
OF THE LIBERTY, KANSAS EVENING SUN

Screenplay By
WES ANDERSON

Story By
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Obituary
(pages 1 to 9)

INSERT:

The proof-print (fresh from the press, with crop marks and registration-X's) of an obituary in the Declines and Deaths Section of a weekly newspaper magazine supplement. A line-drawing depicts an inkpot tipped over spilling a pool of black.

TITLE:

Memorial
 "Editor-in-Chief Dead at 75"
 by the Editorial Staff

INSERT:

A caricature of a tall, bald, pudgy, bespectacled man with a pencil tucked over his ear. Caption: "Arthur Howitzer, Jr. Son of a newspaper publisher, founder of this magazine. (B: 1900, D: 1975.)"

EXT. STREET CORNER. DAY

An ash-blackened (like every facade in this French city), five story, brick and stone building of flats and *bureaux*. It lists slightly to one side. A welded metalwork sign across the upper floor reads: "The French Dispatch (of the Liberty, Kansas Evening Sun)". Down below, at street level: the magazine's delivery dock and, directly adjacent, a narrow, bustling *boîte* with a neon *Bar «Tabac» Journaux* suspended over its striped canopies. Métro station: Printer's District.

A voice (American, female, scholarly) begins:

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)
 It began as a holiday.

CUT TO:

A serving tray on a lazy-Susan. It twists left and right, back and forth, as it fills rapidly with: a *demi-tasse*, coffee in a tiny pitcher, and hot milk in a creamer; a half-bottle of cold white wine, perspiring; a crimson colored cocktail one finger deep; a short-stemmed glass of amber *aperitif*; a jigger of off-black *digestif* (which gets an egg cracked into it, two jolts of spicy sauce, and a raw oyster carefully slid from its half-shell); a small chocolate sundae; Coke in a bottle; a box of cigarettes with a book of matches; and a little glass of water with an effervescent tablet dropped in, fizzing.

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)
 Arthur Howitzer, Jr, college freshman,
 eager to escape a bright future on the
 Great Plains, convinced his father
 (more)

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.) (cont'd)

(proprietor of the Liberty, Kansas Evening Sun) to fund his trans-Atlantic passage as an educational opportunity to learn the family business through the production of a series of travelogue columns to be published for local readers in the Sunday "Picnic" magazine.

The tray booms up and sails, glass rattling but swift and sure, away from camera on the suspended palm and fingertips of a skilled waiter in a black waistcoat and long, white apron.

EXT. REAR COURTYARD. DAY

The *cour* of the same building. A pressboard outhouse; a coal bin; sheaves of pulp-paper; a pile of rinds, crusts, and peels; and a pack of pubescent schoolboys in capes, caps, and short trousers who eat smushed *éclair*s and poke balloon-sticks at a sleeping derelict. The café's rear door bangs open, the boys scatter, and our waiter emerges. In a wide, vertical frame, he speedily ascends (via three staircases, two catwalks, and a ladder) while the obituary continues:

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)

Over the next ten years, he assembled a team of the best expatriate journalists of his time and transformed "Picnic" into "The French Dispatch": a factual weekly report on the subjects of world politics, the arts (high and low), fashion, fancy cuisine/fine drink, and diverse stories of human-interest set in faraway *quartiers*. He brought the world to Kansas.

EXT. SERVICE STAIRS. DAY

A landing at the top floor. A cardboard hangs from a nail on the door: "Silence! Writers Writing". The waiter pulls a chain-latch, bumps the door with a cocked hip, backs inside, then downs the bicarbonate of soda before kicking the door shut with a thwack.

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)

His writers line the spines of every good American library.

MONTAGE:

An office filled with stacked art books and clippings, walls push-pinned top to bottom with postcards of modern art: an unseen woman drapes a negligée over a dressing-screen.

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)

Berensen.

An office stocked with neatly organized galoshes, walking sticks, hats, raincoats, boots, cameras, binoculars, notebooks, maps, and an upside-down bicycle with a flat tire: a man on a footstool, half off-screen, rummages on the top of a supply cabinet.

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)

Sazerac.

A Spartan, white office with only a pine desk and an oak chair: a seated woman, back to camera, smokes.

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)

Krementz.

An office over-decorated in scarlet, lavender, and chartreuse with a marble torso of Adonis: a pair of espadrilled feet stick into view propped up at the end of a chintz daybed.

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)

Roebuck Wright.

In the Press Room: a former-quarterback in rolled up shirt-sleeves, hat tilted back, corrects copy in longhand with his right hand while typing forty words per minute with his left.

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)

One reporter known as the best living writer in quality of sentences per minute.

In the File Room: a freckly string-bean loiters, laughing to himself, as he reads a thesaurus and eats crackers.

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)

One who never completed a single article but haunted the halls cheerily for three decades.

In a formal garden (spectacularly in bloom): a tall Calcuttan in dark sunglasses listens, nods, and takes notes with a braille slate and stylus as a teenage, feminine amanuensis whispers in his ear.

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)

One privately blind writer who wrote keenly through the eyes of others.

At a chalkboard: a proofreader with her hair in a bun parses a sentence. ("They will fail to notice, under the corner of a threadbare rug, the torn ticket-stub for an unclaimed hat which

sits alone on the upper shelf of a cloakroom in a bus depot on the outskirts of the work-a-day town where Nickerson and his accomplices were apprehended.")

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)
The uncontested crackerjack of
grammatical expertise.

INSERT:

A right hand traces a left hand with a long calligraphy brush, then sets to work quickly converting the outline into a gobbling but very stylish turkey.

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)
Cover illustrations by Hermès Jones.

CUT TO:

A tiny man with a *frisée* of curly hair sitting at a drafting table, pleased, as he lovingly adds feathers to his picture.

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)
Famously gracious with his writers,
Arthur Jr. was less courteous with the
rest of the magazine's staff.

Passing footsteps come to a sudden halt, and a finger jolts into shot:

HOWITZER (O.S.)
Oh, no. What's that? I need a turkey.
Stuffed and roasted! On a table with all
the trimmings and Pilgrims and --

CUT TO:

An accountant tallying receipts on an adding machine. An out-of-focus figure, pacing, criss-crosses through frame in the foreground.

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)
His fiscal management-system was
convoluted but functional.

HOWITZER
Give her 150 francs a week for the next
fifteen years against five American cents
per word, minus expenses.

CUT TO:

A door with a frosted window. Painted letters read: Editor-in-Chief. The silhouette of a standing figure listens to the silhouette of a seated one.

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)

His most-repeated literary advice
(perhaps apocryphal) was simply this:

HOWITZER

Try to make it sound like you wrote it
that way on purpose.

EXT. TOWN HOUSE. DAY

A Queen Anne mansion on the best street of an old Mid-western, American city. In front, a uniformed chauffeur waits alongside a parked, mid-seventies hearse.

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)

His return to Liberty comes precisely
fifty years after his departure, on the
occasion of his funeral, by which time
the magazine's circulation exceeds half a
million subscribers in fifty countries.

CUT TO:

An open coffin on display in the parlor. Inside: a basket tied neatly with rope, a portable typewriter, a thick stack of white paper, and a dead body (late seventies, tall, bald, pudgy, bespectacled).

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)

A willow hamper containing umpteen pins,
plaques, and official citations of the
highest order is buried at his side,
along with an Andretti Ribbon-mate and a
ream of triple bond, Egyptian cotton
typing stock.

EXT. PRAIRIE CEMETERY. DAY

A remote graveyard in winter, late afternoon: white sky, white earth. A two-stroke excavator throttles and piston-pops, scraping at the frozen ground.

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)

He received an Editor's Burial.

CUT TO:

A long corridor. The camera follows the waiter with his tray of refreshments as he searches room to room. All desks have been abandoned.

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)

In his will he stipulated that,
immediately upon his death, quote:

INSERT:

A legal document labeled "Last Will and Testament". Editorial comments, corrections, and "stets" (each initialed "A.H.Jr.") decorate the margins in blue pencil. (Example: "Better than melt: liquify.") Howitzer narrates this shot himself:

HOWITZER (V.O.)

The presses will be dismantled and liquified; the editorial offices will be vacated and sold; the staff will be paid ample bonuses and released from their contracts; and the publication of the magazine will permanently cease.

CUT TO:

A stack of magazines bound in twine which thumps onto a sidewalk. A news agent picks up the package and hangs a copy of the final issue by a clip on the shutter of his kiosk. Cover illustration: the spilled inkpot image now rendered in paint and color. Caption below: 1925-1975.

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)

Thus, the publisher's obituary will, also, serve as that of this publication. (All home delivery readers will, of course, be refunded, *pro rata*, for the unfulfilled portion of their subscriptions.)

INT. EDITORIAL OFFICE. DAY

On one wall: a sun-faded map of the state of Kansas. On another: a mock-up of the issue-in-progress with table of contents and cards indicating articles, authors, page numbers, level-of-completion, etc. On a table: the proofreader, frowning, one long-stockinged leg swinging like a pendulum as she flips through manuscript pages. On the couch: a story editor and a legal advisor who mutter and shake their heads as they mark up galleys. In the corner: the cheery writer, reading an almanac and eating pretzels.

Behind his desk, arms folded, deep in thought, Howitzer looks very much as we last saw him (in his casket), though younger by ten years and lighter by a stone.

The waiter discreetly distributes the drinks order.

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)

His epitaph will be taken verbatim from
the carved shingle fixed above the door
of his inner office.

A *cum laude* alumna (cardigan sweater, New England accent) reads
from a spiral bound notebook, re-capping the status of the works-
in-progress:

ALUMNA

Berensen's article. "The Concrete
Masterpiece."

PROOFREADER

(coolly)

Three dangling participles, two split
infinitives, and nine spelling errors in
the first sentence alone.

HOWITZER

(taking exception)

Some of those are intentional.

There is a general murmuring. The alumna flips to the next page.

ALUMNA

The Kremenz story. "Revisions to a
Manifesto."

STORY EDITOR

(darkly)

We asked for twenty-five hundred words,
and she came in at 14,000, plus foot-
notes, endnotes, a glossary, and two
epilogues.

HOWITZER

(definitively)

It's one of her best.

Another murmuring. The alumna flips to the next page again.

ALUMNA

Sazerac?

LEGAL ADVISOR

(defeated)

Impossible to fact-check. He changes all
the names, and only writes about hoboes,
pimps, and junkies.

HOWITZER

(entranced)

These are his people.

Murmuring, round three. The alumna flips the page once more, pauses, then asks, skeptical:

ALUMNA
How about Roebuck Wright?

CHEERY WRITER
(encouraging)
His door's locked, but I could hear the keys clacking.

HOWITZER
(firmly)
Don't rush him.

The room erupts: bustling and chattering in a chaotic hubbub of annoyed complaining. The alumna sips at the Coke bottle and gets to the point:

ALUMNA
The question is: who gets killed? There's one piece too many, even if we print another double-issue, which we can't afford under any circumstances.

The room sighs and groans. Howitzer picks up the chocolate sundae. He eats it in four decisive bites and drinks the *digestif* concoction. A double-rap, then the door cracks open. A copy boy pokes his pimply face into the room.

COPY BOY
Mr. Howitzer, sir? A message from the foreman:
(holding up a chit)
One hour to press.

HOWITZER
(instantly)
You're fired.

COPY BOY
(choking-up)
Really?

Tears stream down the copy boy's flushed cheeks. Howitzer's face tightens. He snarls:

HOWITZER
Don't cry in my office.

Howitzer's index finger juts, diagonal, into the air -- pointing to:

INSERT:

A carved shingle fixed above the door. Two words: "NO CRYING."

The copy boy reads the sign and swallows hard. He nods and exits. Howitzer shuffles the papers on his desk. He drums his fingers for ten seconds.

HOWITZER

Shrink the masthead, cut some ads, and tell the foreman to buy more paper. I'm not killing anybody.

The room erupts again. Howitzer wanders over to the wall where he studies the mock-up of the issue. He switches the order of the cards/articles. He switches them back, uncertain. The camera slowly zooms in on the authors' names in the table of contents.

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)

Good writers. He coddled them, he coaxed them, he ferociously protected them.

Howitzer looks to the waiter lingering at his side.

HOWITZER

What do you think?

The waiter shrugs. It is obvious to him:

WAITER

For myself? I would start with Mr. Sazerac.

Howitzer contemplates this suggestion as the obituary concludes:

EDITORIAL STAFF (V.O.)

These were his people.

Sketchbook
(pages 11 to 17)

INSERT:

The proof-print of a weekly column in the City Section. A line-drawing depicts a Métro station entrance gate.

TITLE:

Local Color
 "The Cycling Reporter"
 by Herbsaint Sazerac

CUT TO:

A touring bicycle with saddlebags and handlebar basket leans on its kickstand at the highest viewpoint above the smog-shrouded city. There is a clipboard steno pad mounted on the headlamp. A pencil dangles from a string.

EXT. PUBLIC SQUARE. DAY

Shuttered shops, shuttered windows, empty street. A voice (earnest, energetic, American) begins:

SAZERAC (V.O.)
 Ennui rises suddenly on a Monday.

A stream of water surges from a storm sewer outlet-valve and rushes along a cobblestone trough, gathering candy wrappers, confetti, and cigarette butts into its current.

SAZERAC (V.O.)
 Rusty water from the *bouches de lavage*
 slooshes down the street gutters.

Clouds of white billow from a row of exhaust pipes above a *boulangerie* as a tired worker cranks open its metal shopfront gate.

SAZERAC (V.O.)
 Woodsmoke puffs from a hungover baker's
 chimney.

Brassieres, slippers, and stockings jolt incrementally into view on a succession of pullied ropes. A cleaning lady with a cigarette dangling from her lips leans out a window, beating a rug.

SAZERAC (V.O.)
 Leathery charwomen put out the morning's
 underthings before the air infuses with
 soot and sweat.

CUT TO:

A tall, trim cyclist, youthful but not young, dressed in a black beret with a black arm band. He holds up his pencil as he pedals up the lane addressing camera warmly. He is Sazerac.

SAZERAC

Through the time machine of poetic license, let us take a sight-seeing tour. A day in Ennui over the course of 250 years.

CUT TO:

Sazerac's P.O.V. with handlebars in frame.

SAZERAC

The great city began as a cluster of tradesman's villages.

INSERT:

A tire company road atlas of the sprawling city with encircling ring-road and suburbs. Caption: "Ennui-sur-Blasé, France. Population: 955,000."

SAZERAC (V.O.)

Only the names remain unchanged.

(Note: titles on the following before-and-after shots label them, on the left, "The Past", on the right, "The Future".)

SPLIT-SCREEN:

On the left, stalls manned by filthy street urchins brushing and polishing dozens of pairs of high-button shoes and boots; on the right, a brightly-lit, two-star inn (*Hôtel de Chaussures*) with automatic sliding-plexiglass door and a coin-operated shoeshine machine in its vestibule.

SAZERAC (V.O.)

The Bootblack District.

On the left, two workers lugging a cart laden with stacked masonry through a gaslit archway; on the right, an unsavory nightclub with a glowing-cursive *La Brique Rouge* over its facade.

SAZERAC (V.O.)

The Bricklayer's Quarter.

On the left, a glass-roofed passage lined with dangling carcasses (cows, pigs, horses); on the right, a subway entrance labeled *Abattoir*.

SAZERAC (V.O.)
Butcher's Arcade.

On the left, a dead-end *impasse* sardine-packed with kleptos, muggers, and hooligans; on the right, the same *impasse* sardine-packed with punk/new-wave drug addicts.

SAZERAC (V.O.)
Pick-pocket Cul-de-Sac.

MONTAGE:

An excavated construction site fifty feet deep with a parked cement truck, stacked lumber/rebar on pallets, and dumpsters filled with demolition-refuse. Sazerac stands on the floor of the enormous yellow-dirt pit. The hook of a crane sways above his head. He addresses camera again:

SAZERAC
On this site: a fabled market vending all forms of victuals and comestibles under a vast, glass-and-cast-iron canopy -- demolished, as you can see, in favor of a multi-level shopping center and parking structure.

A rumbling train car enters a tunnel and stops.

SAZERAC (V.O.)
Like every living city, Ennui supports a menagerie of vermin and scavengers.

A view from the train car window as, outside, emergency-lights shift on, illuminating pipes and ledges trembling with hundreds of chestnut rats. The passengers onboard stare into space, unfazed. (Sazerac, one hand clasping a ceiling-strap and the other steadying his bicycle, marvels at the astonishing infestation.)

SAZERAC (V.O.)
The rats which colonized its subterranean railroad.

A winding block of high-angled intersecting gables and parapets vibrating with hundreds of mangy alley cats. (Sazerac, poking up from a skylight window, sets out a saucer of milk.)

SAZERAC (V.O.)
The cats which colonized its slanty rooftops.

A shallow, stone waterway only two meters wide zig-zagging the gaps between disused brick storehouses. Workers criss-cross flexing planks above the dark water. (Sazerac dips a mini-net

from a pocket fishing-kit, scoops up a clump of wiggling bootlace eels, and eats a handful, raw.)

SAZERAC (V.O.)

The *anguillettes* which colonized its shallow drainage canals.

The previously-seen schoolboys, now crouched behind a parked Citroën delivery van, eat smushed creampuffs, then spring upon an old lady rolling a basket of groceries up the sidewalk and poke balloon-sticks at her. She shouts, furious, and swats violently with her cane until the boys scatter away.

SAZERAC (V.O.)

After receiving the Host, marauding choirboys (half-drunk on the Blood of Christ) stalk unwary pensioners and seek havoc.

A terraced cemetery densely dotted with tombs and markers. At the foot of a modest crypt (labeled, under a weeping angel, "Lucette Sazerac, 1920-1955"), Sazerac arranges a little meal, spread neatly across a rectangle of wax paper, and dines in silence.

SAZERAC (V.O.)

A typical worker's-lunch.

A bi-level street with a steep stone staircase leading from a used bookstore down to a packed café surrounded by mopeds and scooters.

SAZERAC (V.O.)

In the Flop Quarter: students. Hungry, restless, reckless.

A hunchbacked, old man with a cane, a bag of medicine, and a muffler around his neck waits next to a bench on a lonely street. A bus arrives, the door opens, and the old man slowly attempts to bring his foot up to the bottom step.

SAZERAC (V.O.)

In the Hovel District: old people. Old people who have failed.

Sazerac grips a handrail at the rear of a Citroën diaper-service delivery *camionette* as it pulls him swiftly down a congested boulevard on his bicycle. He addresses camera again:

SAZERAC

The automobile: a mixed blessing. On the one hand: the honking, skidding, speeding, sputtering, and backfiring; the emission of toxic fumes and filthy

(more)

SAZERAC (cont'd)

exhaust-pollution; the dangerous accidents; the constant traffic; the high cost of --

The road splits, unexpectedly, and Sazerac (shocked for an instant) jangles down a short staircase, disappearing out of frame, to an unseen crash-site below.

SAZERAC (V.O.)

Department of local statistics:

In a pouring rain: a long, blank, stone wall extending straight up out of frame as far as visible. Painted on it: "Prison/Asylum."

SAZERAC (V.O.)

Average rainfall: 750mm.

In a falling snow: a *pissoir* consisting of a shoulder-level metal privacy screen circling a dirty fountain. Painted on it: "Public Urinal."

SAZERAC (V.O.)

Average snowfall: 190,000 flakes.

A dockworker extends a long pole into the water and drags a face-down, floating corpse toward the shore.

SAZERAC (V.O.)

8.25 bodies are pulled from the *Blasé* river each week (a figure which remains consistent despite advances in health and hygiene).

Well-dressed prostitutes, alone and in pairs, linger in their habitual locations (under a streetlamp, next to a cigarette machine, outside a strip-club stage door).

SAZERAC (V.O.)

As the sun sets, a medley of unregistered streetwalkers and gigolos replaces the day's delivery boys and shopkeepers, and an air of promiscuous calm saturates the hour.

Competing performers (strongman, fire-eater, old woman warbling a torch song) entertain a crowd along the riverside. In the distance: laughter, breaking glass, a gunshot, a scream.

SAZERAC (V.O.)

What sounds will punctuate the night, and what mysteries will they foretell?

Sazerac appears to struggle for control of the bicycle as he dodges potholes. He disappears behind a bookseller's stall and shouts in pain/confusion. His bicycle, surprisingly balanced, immediately reemerges (at speed), now riderless.

SAZERAC (V.O.)

Perhaps the doubtful old maxim speaks true:

Sazerac carries his bicycle over his shoulder down the sidewalk as the sky darkens from blue to black and the lights of the neighborhood twinkle on. The front wheel is bent and twisted like a coat hanger.

SAZERAC (V.O.)

All grand beauties withhold their deepest secrets.

INT. WRITER'S OFFICE (SAZERAC). DAY

On the floor: Sazerac repairs his upturned bicycle. In the corner: the cheery writer reads a dictionary and eats peanuts. At the desk: Howitzer scrutinizes a proof-print, muttering/quoting under his breath:

HOWITZER

"Rats, vermin, gigolos, street walkers..."

Howitzer interrupts himself, looking over his glasses:

HOWITZER

You don't think it's almost too seedy this time? For decent people.

SAZERAC

(slightly offended)

No, I don't. It's supposed to be charming.

Howitzer nods, unconvinced. He shuffles to another page and resumes his muttering/quoting:

HOWITZER

"Pick-pockets, dead bodies, prisons, urinals..."

Howitzer interrupts himself (looking over his glasses) again:

HOWITZER

You don't want to add a flower shop or an art museum? A pretty place of some kind.

SAZERAC
(slightly more offended)
No, I don't. I hate flowers.

Howitzer nods again, reluctant but resigned. Sazerac tightens a spoke. Howitzer shrugs.

HOWITZER
You could cut the second half of the
second paragraph, by the way. You already
repeat it later.

Howitzer holds up the manuscript and points to a bracketed passage. Sazerac, suspicious, squints. Pause.

SAZERAC
OK.

Howitzer crosses out the section of text with a blue pencil.

Story #1
(pages 19 to 57)

INSERT:

The proof-print of a biographical profile in the Arts and Artists Section. A line-drawing depicts a painter's easel.

TITLE:

Studio Portrait
 "The Concrete Masterpiece"
 by J.K.L. Berensen

(Note: the following chapter of the film is presented in black and white with the exception of: 1. the latter-day cutaways to Berensen's talk at a museum in Kansas; and 2. Rosenthaler's work itself, which always appears in color within the black and white scenes.)

INT. RECREATION ROOM. DAY

A white-washed hall the size of a squash court. Walls and ceiling are stained with damp and mold and plastered in concrete-render. Floors are stone, dirt, and mortar. A female model (Simone, age thirty) stands naked on a table, legs apart, feet flat, arms behind her back, frozen in an exceedingly uncomfortable pose. Across the room: a shirtless painter (Moses Rosenthaler, age fifty) in short-shorts and clogs works in oil, briskly and diligently. His body is barrel-chested; his face is thick-bearded; and, from head to toe, he is strikingly paint-splattered. (We see only the back of the medium-sized canvas.)

Rosenthaler pauses and examines his picture. He crosses the room and stares, close-up, at Simone. He grips her arms and firmly draws them back, taut. She frowns slightly. He daubs paint onto the side of her stomach with his brush. He blots color from his palette then daubs at her stomach again. He smudges the paint into her skin with his fingers. He studies the two pigments (oil paint and human flesh). Simone narrows her eyes and bites her lip. Rosenthaler blots to adjust the chroma once more -- but just before he can daub at Simone a third time, she slaps him hard across the face. Rosenthaler recoils, stumbling, scampers across the floor, and returns to his canvas where he immediately resumes his efforts.

Simone holds her pose.

A loud bell rings, a loud buzzer buzzes. Rosenthaler immediately lowers his brush and begins to organize his paints and turpentine into a tool box. Simone disappears behind a wooden panel and pulls a garment down from a hook. Rosenthaler disappears behind a storage locker, pulls off his short-shorts, and washes himself with an industrial hose and scrub-brush.

(Note: the splattered-paint does not come off; in fact, Rosenthaler always appears fully splattered, at all times, in some form of pigment or medium.)

Simone re-emerges, now dressed in the uniform of a prison guard with black baton swinging at her waist. She finishes fixing her hair and tightens her belt. Rosenthaler re-emerges, now dressed in a prisoner's tunic with text stenciled on the back: *Condamné Psychopathe*. He finishes drying himself with a toweling-rag.

Simone slips Rosenthaler's arms into a straitjacket, clips the bindings, clanks open an iron-barred door, and directs the patient/inmate/artist out of the room. The door closes, locks, and latches. Silence.

The camera dollies across the empty space, past the table, the wooden panel, the storage locker, to finally reveal the recto of Rosenthaler's unfinished painting: a thickly encrusted, oily impasto; almost totally abstract; flesh from the tube sculpted and schmearred with red, orange, and yellow skylight; slashed on one side with a black, blue, and purple border of tangled barbed-wire and shattering glass; Simone, unrecognizable, is nevertheless present in every brushstroke.

INT. MUSEUM AUDITORIUM. NIGHT

The spotlight proscenium of a modernist assembly hall. Projected on a screen above the stage: a black and white mug-shot/slide of Rosenthaler, paint-splattered. A woman of-a-certain-age (American, hair-sprayed *coiffure*, *couture* dress) stands at the lectern with a wired remote-switcher clasped in her hand. She is poised, enthusiastic, and vibrantly engaging. She is J.K.L. Berensen.

An attentive audience listens in the dark.

BERENSEN

We take as the subject of tonight's lecture the great painter at the vanguard of the French Splatter-school Action-group, Mr. Moses Rosenthaler. Widely celebrated, as you know, for the bold, dramatic style and colossal scale of his middle-period -- in particular, of course, the polyptych-tableaux known as "Ten Reinforced Cement Aggregate (Load-bearing) Murals" -- he remains, in my opinion, the most eloquent (and, certainly, the loudest) artistic voice of his rowdy generation.

Berensen clicks the remote-switcher, and further black and white slides flip into view showing a panorama-view of ten panels, each sixteen feet tall, which continue and expand the themes of

thickly encrusted flesh, tangled barbed-wire, shattering glass, etc.

BERENSEN

How does this pivotal piece come to find its way into its unique position as a permanent installation here at the Clampette Collection? The story begins in a mess hall.

INT. PRISON CAFETERIA. DAY

A catwalk around the upper perimeter of a cinder-block lunchroom which serves as the viewing platform for a presentation of rudimentary, primitive artworks: a fingerpainting of a tree, a *papier mâché* cactus, a wastebasket fashioned from bound twigs, etc. -- plus Rosenthaler's portrait of Simone, now complete and varnished. A small number of prisoners and guards wanders from piece to piece, perusing and puttering. One prisoner, however, appears to be utterly transfixed by the painting (mentioned above) under his inspection. He is forty, clean-shaven, well groomed; wavy, silver hair, sharply parted; prison uniform, neat and pressed. He is Julian Cadazio.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

The exhibition "Ashtrays, Pots, and Macramé" (a group show of handicrafts by amateur artisans incarcerated in the lunatic section of the Ennui Prison/Asylum) might, perhaps, have been omitted from the annals of art history had it not been for the inclusion in its number of a small painting by Mr. Rosenthaler (who was, at that time, serving a fifty year sentence for the crime of double-homicide), and the observation of that work by a fellow inmate, the Levantine art dealer Mr. Julian Cadazio (who, by fateful coincidence, happened to be imprisoned in the adjoining annex on a charge of second-degree sales tax evasion).

Cadazio signals to a nearby, pot-bellied, wall-eyed guard:

CADAZIO

Guard.

Cadazio's manner lacks any inkling of subservience. The guard reluctantly makes the effort to look up. He waits. Cadazio's eyes have not left the canvas, but in one extended hand: there is a gold foil enveloped *marron-glacé* in a fluted paper candy-cup.

CADAZIO
Who painted this picture?

Pause. The guard slowly approaches, snatches the *bonbon* into his mouth, peers at a small label next to the painting, then studies a corresponding list.

GUARD
Citizen 7524.

CADAZIO
I believe that unit designates Maximum Security for the Demented and Deranged. Are you able to provide me an escort and a Friendly Visit Stamp? For immediate use.

The guard scoffs -- then hesitates. In Cadazio's re-extended hand: three more *marron-glacés*.

INT. LOCK-UP CORRIDOR. DAY

Cadazio follows the guard down a wide passage segmented by consecutive, iron-barred gates.

INT. CELL BLOCK. DAY

A tiny bedroom of extreme austerity: burlap hammock, cracked and yellowed ceramic washbasin, coiled radiator in the corner, padded walls. Rosenthaler and Cadazio face each other seated on low footstools. Simone stands outside the cage-door with a ring of skeleton keys in her hand.

CADAZIO
"Simone, Naked, Cell Block J. Hobby-room." I wish to buy it.

Rosenthaler reacts subtly but at some length (surprise, suspicion, confusion, a hint of sad pride), looks to Simone, then says to Cadazio simply:

ROSENTHALER
Why?

CADAZIO
(simply)
Because I like it.

ROSENTHALER
(simply)
It's not for sale.

CADAZIO
 (dismissive)
 Yes, it is.

ROSENTHALER
 (uncertain)
 No, it's not.

CADAZIO
 (certain)
 Yes, it is. All artists sell all their work. It's what makes you an artist. If you don't plan to sell it, don't paint it. The question is: what's your price?

Cadazio stares hard into Rosenthaler's wounded eyes. Rosenthaler stares back at Cadazio's poker-face -- then looks to Simone again before he mumbles:

ROSENTHALER
 Fifty cigarettes.
 (on second thought)
 Actually, make it seventy-five.

CADAZIO
 (frowns)
 Why do you keep looking at that guard?

Pause. Rosenthaler says inevitably:

ROSENTHALER
 She's Simone.

CADAZIO
 (hesitates)
 Ah.

Cadazio slowly turns to Simone. Simone looks back at him evenly. Cadazio nods, looks back to Rosenthaler, and says crisply:

CADAZIO
 I don't want to buy this important piece for fifty cigarettes --

ROSENTHALER
 Seventy-five.

CADAZIO
 -- or seventy-five of prison currency. I want to pay you 250,000 francs in legal French tender. Do we agree? On the sale.

Rosenthaler's eyes widen. He and Cadazio both now look to Simone. Simone, mightily impressed, says softly:

SIMONE

Uh-huh.

Cadazio digs into his pockets for a handful of coins and cigarettes plus his last *marron-glacé* as he explains:

CADAZIO

I can only offer a deposit of --
 (counting coins)
 -- 83 *centimes*, one candied-chestnut, and four cigarettes (everything I have), at this present moment; however, if you'll accept my signatory-voucher, I assure you, a check for the outstanding balance will be remitted to your account within ninety days. Where do you bank? Never mind.

Cadazio scribbles on a business card and hands it to Rosenthaler. Rosenthaler jabs one cigarette into his mouth, passes the second to Cadazio, sticks the spares under the elastic of his sock -- then presents the sweet to Simone. She eats, they smoke. Cadazio asks bluntly:

CADAZIO

How'd you learn to do it, by the way? Paint this kind of picture. Also: who did you murder (and how crazy are you, really)? I need background information so we can do a monograph. It makes you more important.

(expansively)

Who are you --

Cadazio leans forward and reads from a tin dog-tag hanging from a string around Rosenthaler's neck:

CADAZIO

-- Moses Rosenthaler?

CUT TO:

The museum auditorium. Berensen is at her lectern. On the screen: a turn-of-the-century photograph of a bearded, well-to-do man seated bareback on a massive stallion alongside a very small boy on a very small pony.

BERENSEN

Born rich, the son of a Jewish-Mexican horse rancher, Miguel Sebastien Maria Moisés de Rosenthaler trained at the *École des Antiquités* at significant family expense; but, by the end of his youth, he had shed all the luxuries of
 (more)

BERENSEN (cont'd)

his comfortable background and replaced them with:

MONTAGE:

A filthy garret apartment with skylight windows, four unmade beds (one occupied by an unconscious, face down woman), and three artists at easels, all painting still-lives. Among them is young Rosenthaler (played by a younger actor), already paint-splattered (though in softer hues), holding a bottle of beer in the same hand as his brush.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

Squalor.

A footbridge busy with tourists. Young Rosenthaler paints the river view while holding a bottle of wine in the same hand as his brush. A passer-by drops a coin into his upturned hat.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

Hunger.

A boxcar clacking along a curving track above a sunflower field. Young Rosenthaler, in hobo rags, paints a flea-bitten dog while holding a flask of whiskey in the same hand as his brush.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

Loneliness.

The terrace of a white stone desert fort. Young Rosenthaler, in khakis and *kepi*, paints a seated officer while holding a snifter of cognac in the same hand as his brush. A whizzing bullet pierces the canvas, and the company scrambles for weapons and cover -- except Rosenthaler, who continues calmly at his canvas.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

Physical danger.

A weedy cloister with stone walls and scattered pebbles. Young Rosenthaler, naked, his dark-shadowed eyes bloodshot and deranged, paints a self-portrait in a hand mirror while holding a beaker of *eau-de-vie* in the same hand as his brush.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

Mental illness.

A dockside tavern. Young Rosenthaler, in sleeveless undershirt, paints a picture of an absinthe bottle while holding a glass of its contents in the same hand as his brush.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

And, of course, criminal violence.

At the other end of the bar, two hulking, smirking bartenders lean on the counter in front of a weathered, elderly man, needling him. The old man is stoic. Young Rosenthaler watches like an animal. Under his breath, almost inaudibly but unmistakably: he growls. The camera dollies to a kitchen door porthole where a scullery boy renders (with a meat-saw) the hanging carcass of a slaughtered calf.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

He did not pick up a brush during the first decade of his long prison sentence.

A padded prison cell. Young Rosenthaler, splattered in machine-grease, pours a single shot from a bottle labeled Mouthwash *de Menthe* (150 proof). Off-screen: a latch clanks. Young Rosenthaler looks up. He rises from his stool and makes way as his older self, identically dressed and splattered, enters and (with a gentle acknowledgement, eye to eye, of the boy he once was) takes the seat. Young Rosenthaler removes the dog-tag from around his own neck and loops it over older Rosenthaler's head. Young Rosenthaler exits. Older Rosenthaler sips the mouthwash and stares at the blank walls.

TITLE:

Year 11, Day 1

INT. CRAFTS STUDIO. DAY

A basement classroom. Simone sits at a metal desk next to the door. Fifteen prisoners shuffle past her and file into rows of benches behind footstools prepared with various pottery-making supplies. Rosenthaler enters last. He pauses in front of Simone and says quietly:

ROSENTHALER

Permission to sign up for Activity-privileges, *gardienne*.

SIMONE

(without looking up)
You have a Registration chit?

ROSENTHALER

(hesitates)
This thing?

Rosenthaler digs into his pockets. He produces a small, thin ticket and holds it up, uncertain. Simone tears the corner and gives it back to him. As Rosenthaler begins to move toward his seat -- Simone stops him with an announcement:

SIMONE

Attention. We have a new convict joining us today. Citizen 7524, address the class.

Rosenthaler, startled, speaks under his breath:

ROSENTHALER

What do you mean?

SIMONE

Tell the group about yourself.

ROSENTHALER

I don't want to do that.

SIMONE

It's mandatory.

ROSENTHALER

They know me already.

SIMONE

That's not the point.

ROSENTHALER

I didn't prepare any speech.

SIMONE

(an official order)

Say something.

Rosenthaler looks stricken. Simone nods for him to speak. He turns to the room. He gathers his thoughts. Finally, he begins:

ROSENTHALER

I've been here 3647 days and nights. Another 14,603 to go. I drink fourteen pints of mouthwash-rations per week. At that rate, I'm going to poison myself to death before I ever see the world again, which makes me feel -- very sad. I've got to change my program. I've got to go in a new direction. Anything I can do to keep my hands busy: I'm going to do it. Otherwise, I think maybe it's going to be a suicide. That's why I signed up for Clay Pottery and Basket Weaving. My name is Moses.

Troubled convicts (shorn heads, crooked noses, combat scars) stare at Rosenthaler. His hard face is streaked with tears. Simone says simply:

SIMONE

Take a pew.

Simone points. Rosenthaler looks to: a hunk of wet clay on a footstool in front of an empty seat at the back of the room.

CUT TO:

Five minutes later. The entire class of convicts has gathered to watch, intrigued, as Rosenthaler briskly, nimbly, expertly sculpts. Rosenthaler pauses to study his work. He twists the sculpture around for everyone to see.

INSERT:

A hasty but magnificent vase with bas-relief depicting a bouquet of wildflowers with wind-blown petals floating in the air and a crane standing on one leg. Simone descends into the shot and studies the vessel -- impressed, then suddenly and deeply moved. Rosenthaler asks softly:

ROSENTHALER (O.S.)

What's your name, *gardienne*?

Simone looks up to Rosenthaler. Her lips move, but her voice is inaudible under Berensen's:

BERENSEN (V.O.)

Certain women do gravitate toward incarcerated men. It's a recognized condition.

Rosenthaler's rough, clay-splattered hand enters frame with a blade of straw pinched between two fingers, and, in one rapid, sure effort: cuts a beautiful, extravagantly-filigreed letter "S" into the wet clay on a cloud above the etched flora.

CUT TO:

Berensen at her lectern.

BERENSEN

Something about the captivity of others enhances the experience of their own freedom. I assure you, it's erotic. Look at her, by the way.

Berensen remote-switches through a succession of black and white slides of Simone: at fourteen, with numerous siblings, reaping in a wheat field; at sixteen, pregnant, plucking a goose; at eighteen, not pregnant, skinning a rabbit; at twenty, in a nurse's uniform on a battlefield with soldiers advancing and retreating in the background.

(Note: in each of these images, all other subjects, human and animal, are blurry; only Simone holds completely still for the photograph.)

BERENSEN

Born into quasi-serfdom. Sixteen brothers and sisters. Illiterate until she was twenty. Now a woman of considerable property. Radiant.

Paused on the screen: an image of a somewhat younger, paint-splattered, naked Berensen caught reaching for a dressing gown. Berensen finally notices and mutters, startled:

BERENSEN

Good God. Wrong slide. (That's me.)

Berensen remote-switches back to Simone at eighteen, briskly recomposes herself, and carries on:

BERENSEN

Simone, of course, refused all Rosenthaler's entreaties of marriage (which, we are told, were frequent and marvelously enthusiastic).

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM. NIGHT

Midnight. Rosenthaler and Simone, motionless and naked, recline on a heap of bed linens and dishrags in a deep pile on the floor. Berensen continues:

BERENSEN (V.O.)

She insists to this day (I'm going to quote from her finely-written memoir): "I never belonged to Moses Rosenthaler. Not for a single day, not for a single hour. I merely bore him a warm, deeply affectionate esteem."

In the meantime, Rosenthaler has been searching for the words to begin the scene:

ROSENTHALER

I want to say it as simple as I can. To try to shape it into words. The feelings in my heart.

Simone and Rosenthaler say simultaneously:

ROSENTHALER

I love you.

SIMONE

I don't love you.

ROSENTHALER
(frowning)
What?

SIMONE
I don't love you.

ROSENTHALER
(hesitates)
Already?

SIMONE
(blankly)
Already what?

ROSENTHALER
Already how do you know that? How can you
be sure? So quick.

SIMONE
(with certainty)
I'm sure.

ROSENTHALER
(wounded)
Ouch. That hurts me. The cruelty of it.
The cold-bloodedness.

SIMONE
You said what you wanted to say. I tried
to stop you. That's it.

ROSENTHALER
I said part of what I wanted to say. I
was in the middle of it. There's more.

Silence. Rosenthaler attempts to propose marriage:

ROSENTHALER
Will --

SIMONE
(interrupting)
No.

ROSENTHALER
Will you --

SIMONE
(interrupting)
No.

ROSENTHALER
Will you marry --

SIMONE

(interrupting)

Should I put you in your straitjacket,
take you back to your cell, and lock you
up again?

Rosenthaler sighs. He digs out a bottle of mouthwash from the tangled linens and takes a sip. Simone frowns. Rosenthaler explains:

ROSENTHALER

It's diluted.

Pause. Simone produces a child's sock from a knitted sack and begins to darn it. Rosenthaler looks up and stares into the camera. His face lightens.

CUT TO:

Rosenthaler's P.O.V. of the ceiling. Purple soot blackens its edges and corners. Nicotine yellows its cracked plaster. Rusty water stains speckle all across in faded flesh-tones. Decades of pollution and decay meld into a spectacular visual pandemonium.

Rosenthaler says, transported:

ROSENTHALER

I need art supplies (canvas, stretchers,
paints, brushes, turpentine).

SIMONE

(continuing to darn)

What do you want to paint?

ROSENTHALER

The future.

Rosenthaler turns to look into Simone's eyes. He says profoundly:

ROSENTHALER

Which is you.

CUT TO:

Berensen at her lectern again.

BERENSEN

Widely not considered a great
connoisseur, Julian Cadazio,
nevertheless, had an eye for something,
and he did us all a very good turn when,
the hour he was released from prison --

EXT. ART GALLERY. NIGHT

A storefront situated on a brief cul-de-sac over the river. Beveled letters above the door identify it as: "Cadazio Uncles and Nephew *Galerie* (Landscapes, Still-lives, and *Objets d'Art*)".

BERENSEN (V.O.)

-- he summoned his uncles to the gallery
on the *Esplanade des Charpentiers*.

INT. ART GALLERY. NIGHT

A showroom one flight up from the street. Summery landscapes on one wall. Kitchen-table still-lives on another. Bronze heads on pedestals. Cadazio stands next to an easel which displays a hidden artwork cloaked in velvet. He addresses his uncles Nick and Joe.

CADAZIO

We're done with flowers and fruit bowls.
We're finished with beaches and
seascapes. We're getting out of armor,
rugs, and tapestries, too. I found
something new. (In prison.)

Cadazio unveils the familiar canvas ("Simone, Naked, etc."). His uncles immediately produce various corrective lenses (spectacles, monocle, a magnifying glass) and stare for a long moment. Finally:

UNCLE NICK

Modern art?

CADAZIO

(profoundly)

Modern art. Our specialty, starting now.

UNCLE JOE

(befuddled)

I don't get it.

CADAZIO

(obviously)

Of course, you don't.

UNCLE JOE

Am I too old?

CADAZIO

(naturally)

Of course, you are.

UNCLE NICK
 (skeptical)
 Why is this good?

CADAZIO
 (confident)
 It isn't good. Wrong idea.

UNCLE JOE
 (bristling)
 That's no answer.

CADAZIO
 (with satisfaction)
 My point. You see the girl in it?

UNCLE JOE/UNCLE NICK
 (simultaneously)
 No.

CADAZIO
 (definitively)
 Trust me, she's there.

As Cadazio goes to a cabinet of shallow file-drawers, opens the top one, and withdraws a beige envelope, he continues:

CADAZIO
 One way to tell if a modern artist actually knows what he's doing is to get him to paint you a horse or a flower or a sinking battleship or something that's actually supposed to look like the thing it's actually supposed to look like. Can he do it? Look at this:

Cadazio opens the envelope and produces:

INSERT:

A charcoal drawing of a bird, simple and exquisite.

Uncle Nick holds the picture carefully by the edges and studies it. Cadazio snaps his fingers.

CADAZIO
 Drawn in forty-five seconds right in front of me with a burnt matchstick.

UNCLE NICK
 (now genuinely impressed)
 A perfect sparrow. That's excellent. May I keep it?

CADAZIO

Don't be stupid. Of course, not. The point is: he could paint this --

After a brief, delicate tug-of-war, Uncle Nick, reluctantly, releases the drawing back to Cadazio.

CADAZIO

-- beautifully, if he wanted to, but he thinks this --

Cadazio points to "Simone".

CADAZIO

-- is better.

Cadazio is almost surprised to realize that he, honestly, means the following:

CADAZIO

And I think I sort of agree with him.

The uncles examine the canvas, touching it, smelling it, etc. Cadazio says with finality:

CADAZIO

"Simone, Naked, Cell Block J. Hobby-room" is probably a masterpiece worth a significant, even exorbitant sum of money -- but not yet.

Uncle Nick folds his hands and nods. He says mystically:

UNCLE NICK

The desire must be created.

Cadazio nods, also mystical. Silence. Uncle Joe blurts:

UNCLE JOE

How long's he in for?

INT. HEARING CHAMBER. DAY

A court of law. Three magistrates on one side of an elevated altar watch as Simone escorts Rosenthaler (in straitjacket and leg-irons) from a side door to a central chair. She padlocks him to the armrest. Rosenthaler sits, wary, facing his judges. Ten rows of benches behind him are empty with the exception of the front, occupied by Cadazio and his uncles. Simone, on a stool at Rosenthaler's side, sets to work darning another child's sock as the proceedings begin:

CHIEF MAGISTRATE

A new petition for special parole board review has been filed on behalf of Citizen 7524 in relation to the crimes of Assault, Battery, and Violent Dismemberment. Mr. Rosenthaler, why should we put you back on the street?

ROSENTHALER

(softly)

Because it was an accident, your honor. I didn't intend to kill anybody.

The Chief Magistrate raises an eyebrow. He says evenly:

CHIEF MAGISTRATE

You decapitated two bartenders with a meat-saw.

Rosenthaler hesitates. He confers briefly with Simone at a whisper. He nods and clarifies:

ROSENTHALER

The first bartender was an accident. The second was self-defense.

The magistrates murmur. Simone resumes her darning.

CHIEF MAGISTRATE

Be that as it may: what demonstration of genuine remorse or (at the very least) regret can you offer? For beheading these men.

Rosenthaler scratches his chin. He looks out the window. A bird of prey snatches a white dove out of the sky in a puff of feathers. Rosenthaler says, sincerely and genuinely apologetic, almost inaudible:

ROSENTHALER

They had it coming.

CHIEF MAGISTRATE

(sharply)

I beg your pardon?

Cadazio interrupts loudly, more or less completely drowning out Rosenthaler as he repeats himself:

ROSENTHALER

They had it coming?

CADAZIO

Forgive me.

The Chief Magistrate frowns. Rosenthaler turns. Simone pauses her darning. Cadazio, unexpectedly: has raised his hand.

CADAZIO

Is there a part of this ritual where you ask if anybody has something to say before it's too late? Like at a wedding.

CHIEF MAGISTRATE

CADAZIO

No.

I'll be brief.

Cadazio's uncles look uneasy but intrigued as Cadazio crawls over a partition (slipping slightly as he struggles to get his leg over) and "approaches the bench". The magistrates make no effort to impede him -- though their expressions suggest extreme disapproval. Cadazio launches into a persuasive spiel:

CADAZIO

We all know this man is a murderer. Totally guilty of first-degree homicide, anyway you slice it. That's a given. However: he's, also, that rare, once-in-a-generation guy you hear about but never get the chance to discover for yourself: an artistic genius. Surely, there ought to be a double-standard for this sort of predicament. (Supposedly, he's a psychotic, by the way. That's not his fault.) Respectfully, I submit: maybe we could think up some other way to punish him? I'm looking for the wiggle-room.

Cadazio looks to his uncles. They nod, concerned and serious. The magistrates are a stone wall.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

Rosenthaler's right to petition for parole was permanently revoked for the duration of his sentence.

Simone is already putting away her darning. Uncle Joe interjects from the stalls:

UNCLE JOE

No further questions.

CUT TO:

Berensen at her lectern again.

BERENSEN

Nevertheless, Cadazio and his uncles were unanimous in their decision to promote the artist as his exclusive brokers throughout the free world.

INSERT:

A promotional poster advertising a public debate in a town hall. Across the top: a photograph of "Simone, Naked, etc." Across the bottom: "The Next Mona Lisa?"

BERENSEN (V.O.)
"Simone" traveled far and wide.

MONTAGE:

The painting is shown on display in various exhibition spaces around the world. In each location, a violent riot is in-progress among art patrons in dinner jackets and evening gowns. First: a municipal meeting hall in France. Champagne bottles fly through the air, shattering and exploding.

BERENSEN (V.O.)
The Ennui Salon.

Next: a vast conservatory in England. Punching, choking, shouting, screaming, bleeding.

BERENSEN (V.O.)
The Royal Exposition.

Finally: a tent at a middle-American harvest-festival with carnival rides, cotton candy, shooting gallery, etc. One group of attendees attempts to light the venue on fire while another group resists them.

BERENSEN (V.O.)
The International Pavilion at the Liberty, Kansas State Fair (which was very nearly burned to the ground).

Cadazio and his uncles watch the destructive skirmish, eyes bright, gleeful.

BERENSEN (V.O.)
In short, the picture was a sensation.

INT. AUCTION HOUSE. DAY

On the block: Rosenthaler's perfect sparrow. Paddles rise and fall in rapid succession as an auctioneer, startled but enthusiastic, tries to keep up with exuberant bidding.

BERENSEN (V.O.)
(Even the artist's all-but-forgotten, earlier work inspired wildly robust sales on the secondary market.)

Additional lots wait in the wings: Rosenthaler's previously-seen still life, river view, flea-bitten dog, self-portrait, absinthe

bottle, and seated officer at desert fort (bullet hole still intact).

CUT TO:

Berensen at her lectern again.

BERENSEN

Meanwhile, Rosenthaler continued to work in confinement. Strikingly, the artist favored raw materials sourced exclusively from within the prison/asylum domain:

MONTAGE:

The camera shoots through an expansive pane of glass which fills the frame as Rosenthaler paints directly onto it, brushing and slashing in aggressive bursts (and jump-cuts), one color at a time. First: a dusty, pale orange.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

Powdered eggs.

Next: a thick, dark red.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

Pigeon blood.

Next: an oily black.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

Shackle grease.

Next: shades of dirty ash.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

Coal, cork, and dung.

Next: a waxy, nearly fluorescent, slightly sudsy yellow.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

Bright yellow scullery-soap.

Finally: a lukewarm porridge.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

And fresh cream of millet as a binding agent.

MONTAGE:

A naked Simone strikes various poses which appear to be (and, in fact, without the aid of visual effects, are) physically

impossible. First: body twisted like a corkscrew, arms double-jointed akimbo, illuminated from a high window.

BERENSEN (V.O.)
Simone liked to stand still.

Next: flamingo-legged, fingers laced palms up, underlit by a flickering oil lamp.

BERENSEN (V.O.)
Indeed, she was Olympian in her ability to hold extremely challenging positions for extended periods of time.

Next: seated on a steaming radiator in thinker pose, puffs of breath visible in the frigid air.

BERENSEN (V.O.)
She exhibited very little vulnerability to extremes of heat or cold.

Next: in close-up, calmly ignoring a mosquito biting her cheek. It takes off, leaving only a tiny dot of blood which Simone wipes away with her pinky, perfectly clean.

BERENSEN (V.O.)
After even the most adverse forms of exposure, her skin remained unburned, unblemished, un-goose-pimpled.

Next: hanging upside down from a ceiling pipe in a frozen butterfly stroke.

BERENSEN (V.O.)
Another tidbit: she genuinely enjoyed the smell of turpentine --

Finally: cleaning splattered paint from her arms and legs with steel wool and distilled acid.

BERENSEN (V.O.)
-- and, in later years, actually wore it in the application of her toilet. (It's absolutely true. You could smell the solvent on her body.)

INT. EXECUTION THEATRE. DAY

A small, round chamber as tall as a silo. At a grated landing mounted to the wall: an open, iron clad hatch. The latch has been pried open, and the door handle lies below in a pile of splinters and screws. Narrow steps wind along the wall ten feet down to a disapproving guard with his hands in his pockets. He

stands next to a control panel featuring a prominent throw-switch.

BERENSEN (V.O.)
She was more than a muse.

Rosenthaler says grimly, off-screen:

ROSENTHALER (O.S.)
Throw the switch.

The guard snorts dismissively. On the other side of the room: Rosenthaler is seated in an electric chair with a metal headband clamped around his forehead and leather bindings belted around his wrists. He explodes:

ROSENTHALER
Throw the switch, you cocksucker!

Simone appears in the doorway. She frowns.

SIMONE
What's wrong with you? Go back to work.

Rosenthaler looks slightly guilty -- but defiant. He insists:

ROSENTHALER
I can't. I won't. It's too hard. It's torture. I'm -- I'm -- literally: I'm a tortured artist.

Simone's eyes flash down to a half-finished bottle of mouthwash tucked discreetly next to one of the legs of the electric chair. She says gently:

SIMONE
Poor baby.

Simone descends the staircase as she says calmly to the guard:

SIMONE
Get out.

The guard exits. Simone stares at Rosenthaler, curious. Rosenthaler stares back at her, bitter. Simone reaches for the throw-switch and flips it for a fraction of a second. There is a powerful clack, and Rosenthaler takes a 10,000-volt zap to the body. His hair sparks, his body spasms, and smoke comes out of his ears. After a brief moment of frozen astonishment, trembling and smoldering, he glares at Simone, wary. Simone shrugs.

SIMONE
Is that what you want?

Silence. Simone approaches and stops in front of Rosenthaler with her hands on her hips. She says, matter-of-fact:

SIMONE

I grew up on a farm. We didn't write poetry. We didn't make music. We didn't sculpt statues or paint pictures. I learned arts and crafts technique from books in this prison's library, and I teach them as a volunteer. I don't know what you know. I only know what you are. I can see you're suffering. I can see it's difficult. It might even get worse -- but then it's going to get better. You're going to figure out whatever your problem is. (What's your problem?)

ROSENTHALER

(crippled)

I don't know what to paint.

SIMONE

You're going to figure out what to paint, and you're going to believe in yourself (like I do), and you're going to struggle -- and then, in the spring, or maybe the summer, or possibly the fall, or, at the very latest, the winter: this new work will be complete. That's what's going to happen.

Simone holds the throw-switch again -- Rosenthaler flinches -- as she asks:

SIMONE

Unless you still prefer to execute yourself right now?

Rosenthaler slips his hands out the bindings and takes off the metal headband, then ascends the steps and goes out the door. Simone returns to the control panel and clicks off the power. The electric chair jiggles and rattles as it hums down to silence.

CUT TO:

Berensen at her lectern again.

BERENSEN

The French Splatter-school Action-group.

Berensen brings up a slide of a gathering of paint-splattered men (burly, grumpy, unwashed, disheveled, stylish) and one woman (small-boned but indestructible) posing for a photograph on the

street below a prison window. Rosenthaler, inside, smiles broadly.

BERENSEN

A dynamic, talented, lusty, slovenly, alcoholic, violent pack of creative savages. They inspired and, often, personally attacked each other for two decades and more. (I'll have my drink now.)

Berensen reaches into a nook in the lectern and produces a small thermos, which she empties, neat, into a short glass. She comes out from behind her lectern and stands near the edge of the stage, closer to the audience, sipping as she continues more intimately:

BERENSEN

Remember, in those days, as you know, it was much more socially acceptable for a painter or sculptor to hit another fellow with a chair (or even a brick) or walk around with a black eye or a broken tooth and so on. Indeed, I'm jumping ahead, but, in my own experience, Rosenthaler could be quite unpredictably impulsive, meaning, I refer to the pigment-locker below his studio on the *Boulevard des Plombiers*, on one occasion, he grabbed me and put me in there, and, inappropriately, sort of, tried to --
(stage-whispering)

-- fuck me against the wall in the corner of that pigment-locker. He was crazy (officially certified).

Berensen turns away and circles back behind her lectern. She refers briefly to her notes, then presses on:

BERENSEN

The Cadazios, of course, represented them all.

EXT. COMPOUND ENTRANCE. DAY

Two guards slowly slide open a pair of high, steel-clad, spike-topped, oak doors revealing Cadazio and his uncles waiting on the road outside. In the reverse angle: two other guards slowly slide open another pair of identical doors, revealing Rosenthaler (shackles/straitjacket) waiting with Simone in the recess court inside. The two opposing parties advance to meet at a locked, iron-barred gate in the middle.

TITLE:

Three Years Later

Cadazio faces Rosenthaler, arms crossed, steely. Uncle Joe stands behind him. A servant provides a chair for Uncle Nick who sits with arms propped on the top of his cane. Cadazio addresses Rosenthaler crisply:

CADAZIO

It's three years later. We've made you the most famous painter alive based on one small, scribbly, over-rated picture. You're an art school course. You're an encyclopedia entry. Even your disciples have won and squandered multiple fortunes. Yet you refuse to show us so much as a sketch or study for a single new piece during this entire, protracted period. How long are we meant to wait? Well, don't answer, because we're not asking. We already printed the invitations.

Uncle Joe holds up a letter-press card on thick, gold-trimmed stock embossed luxuriously with scarlet script.

CADAZIO

We're coming in. All of us. The collectors. The critics. Even your second-rate imitators (we represent) who suck up to you and smuggle you goodies and probably turn out to be better than you are. The bribes, alone, are going to be outrageous, as these guards can assure you. But we're going to pay them. So finish it, whatever it is. The show's in two weeks.

Cadazio holds up two fingers. Rosenthaler grits his teeth, stained and chipped. Once again, softly: he growls. (Another guard, armed with a carbine, watches from a turret above.) Cadazio retreats slightly while attempting to mask his instinctive fear. He points to Simone:

CADAZIO

She thinks it's ready, by the way.

Rosenthaler flinches, surprised. He frowns and turns to Simone. Simone nods.

SIMONE

It's ready.

Rosenthaler looks betrayed. Simone looks nonplussed. Cadazio looks vindicated. Rosenthaler murmurs, vaguely optimistic:

ROSENTHALER

I could use another year.

Cadazio screams in frustration, and his uncles throw their hands up into the air, grip their hair, close their eyes, shake their heads, etc.

CUT TO:

Berensen at her lectern again.

BERENSEN

My employer, at that time, received the intriguing summons by rapid-priority wire. I refer, of course, to Upshur "Maw" Clampette.

Berensen brings up a triptych of black and white slides: one shows a landmark, modernist residence resembling a doorstep which overlooks a corn field; the other two show vitrines filled with Ancient Greek, Roman, and Egyptian idols, tools, and vessels.

BERENSEN

Astute collector of antiquities.

Berensen remote-switches to another triptych: one shows a closer view of the same house; the other two show rooms filled with cubist and surrealist paintings and sculptures -- and the visiting artists who created them.

BERENSEN

Great friend to the *avant-garde*.

Berensen remote-switches to a slide of a pioneer-handsome, sixty-year-old woman, slightly stout, perfect carriage, ebony black eyes, dressed and done in the most highly refined, sophisticated, continental style. She is outdoors, seated in an armchair shaped like a lobster. She is Upshur "Maw" Clampette. A water tower in the background reads: Liberty, KS.

BERENSEN

Her collection, even in its infancy, was well-known and important (as was her residence, Ingo Steen's first American commission, known, informally, as the "Doorstop House"). It was my duty and, I may say, my privilege to catalogue, archive, and advise -- although she did whatever the hell she wanted no matter what you told her, anyway.

Berensen clicks off the projector.

BERENSEN

Thus, we began the long journey from
Liberty to Ennui.

EXT. SLEEPER PLANE. NIGHT

An amphibious aircraft in flight over the Atlantic Ocean (left to right). Clouds wisp by in the background as we dissolve to a cut-away view of the interior of the vessel. Waiters prepare cocktails, and passengers read magazines. In first class, privatized: Clampette (in an embroidered, kimono-style dressing gown) sits at a low table smoking a cigarette and drinking a night-cap as she completes her correspondence with the assistance of a social secretary and a somewhat younger Berensen, herself. Clampette rises, and a maid enters with an ashtray and a hairnet which she stretches over her mistress' head as they make their way down the aisle to a section of curtained bunks. A doctor appears from aft with a tray of tonics and remedies. He spoons two doses of milk of magnesia directly into Clampette's mouth, followed by a brief hypodermic injection to the shoulder. Berensen assists Clampette up the ladder to her bunk and passes her a mystery novel open to the correct page. Clampette offers Berensen her unfinished cigarette, and they pass it back and forth, sharing the last few puffs before Clampette pulls the curtains shut. Berensen enters the lower bunk and pulls her own curtains shut. Her hand pokes out through a gap in the fabric to tap ash onto the floor. The lights in the cabin go dim.

Throughout this scene, Cadazio dictates in voiceover:

CADAZIO (V.O.)

My dear Mrs. Clampette ("Maw", if I may), please, join us for the first-display of Mr. Moses Rosenthaler's extremely exciting new work (which I, myself, have not yet been permitted to see). In order to facilitate the viewing in a timely fashion, it may prove necessary for us to surreptitiously gain access to the facility where the artist currently resides. Please, rely on my operatives to organize any and all details and preparations for your visit. Caution: do not bring matches, lighters, or sharp objects of any kind. We await your confirmation with cheerful anticipation. Yours most truly, Cadazio Uncles and Nephew *Galerie* concern.

INT. ART GALLERY. NIGHT

Cadazio and his uncles wait, standing and seated in various positions around the showroom. They are dressed for the evening. Scarves and coats are draped on chair backs and pedestals. Three thick bundles of large-format banknotes, each the size of a sheet of writing paper, rest stacked on a gilded tabletop at the center of the room. Each uncle checks the time (by pocket-watch, wristwatch, or hourglass) while Berensen explains:

BERENSEN (V.O.)

The paddy-wagon collected us directly after the night's final round of working girls and revelers were delivered to the drunk-tank at 3am.

Cadazio opens the curtains to check the clock tower above the place across the river.

CUT TO:

A high-angle shot racing up one of the city's narrow streets following a motorcade composed of two police motorcycles and a large paddy-wagon with cherry-lights whirling and sirens howling, blasting, blaring, and wailing.

MONTAGE:

The rear section of a prisoner-transport vehicle with wire-mesh windows and steel benches in two sets of tiered, facing rows. The passengers include: Cadazio and his uncles; Clampette and Berensen; Clampette's secretary; sixteen additional well-heeled art collectors in furs, jewels, dinner jackets, black tie, etc; the entire coterie of the French Splatter-school, as seen in the earlier photograph, along with their girlfriends (who appear to be prostitutes); and two, uniformed wait-staff. All carry copies of an exhibition-program labeled Rosenthaler/Cadazio.

Overhead angle: Cadazio's hands count out a bribe into the palm of the paddy-wagon driver.

A long, subterranean corridor of stone and mortar construction with a narrow, brick path running alongside a coursing drainage-gutter. Cadazio leads the procession described above, flanked like a priest by two waterworks-men in pin-striped overalls (who carry glowing acetylene gas-lamps) and the two wait-staff (who push rolling hotel service-trollies).

Overhead angle: Cadazio's hands count out a bribe into the palms of the two waterworks-men.

A cement-paved exercise yard seen from a high tower. Searchlights, periodically, sweep across the walls and cast

barbed-wire shadows. The visitors traverse, diagonal, in silent single-file, escorted by a quartet of prison guards.

Overhead angle: Cadazio's hands count out bribes into the palms of the four guards.

A wide passage segmented by consecutive, iron-barred gates. Jeers and taunts echo and reverberate from rows of cells as the congregation advances behind a dozen prison guards *en masse* through the dimly-lit penitentiary.

Overhead angle: Cadazio's hands count out bribes into the palms of the twelve guards.

INT. RECREATION ROOM. NIGHT

An open doorway looking out from a pitch black space. The last guests, one by one, cross the threshold. The door closes, locks, and latches. We are in complete darkness. Long silence. A hushed murmur. Cadazio's voice calls out:

CADAZIO
Moses, are you here?

A beat. Then: Rosenthaler's voice grunts from somewhere across the room:

ROSENTHALER
Uh-huh.

CADAZIO
(nervous)
Any words of introduction? Or, perhaps, a welcome to our wonderful guests, some of whom have traveled a great distance to come see your work, I hope? Or, alternatively, just, I don't know. Hello?

SIMONE
(also in the dark)
Lights.

There is a contact-bang, and the hobby-room (the previously-seen white-washed hall the size of a squash court) lights up bright: the space is now entirely muraled in ten astonishing panels, each sixteen feet tall, as seen in Berensen's lecture-slides. (Now, for the first time, we see them in color, and they are magnificent.)

Rosenthaler, seated in a wheelchair, wears a mattress-ticking necktie with his prison uniform. He is stone-faced. Simone stands at his side.

Cadazio absorbs the view: the artist and the opus. His mouth falls open. His eyes goggle. He shouts at the silent gathering:

CADAZIO
Quiet, please!

A moment. Suddenly, Cadazio bubbles over and exclaims, voice cracking and screeching like an adolescent schoolboy's:

CADAZIO
I did it!

Cadazio pumps his fists and scrabbles to the center of the room, spinning in all directions to observe the encircling artwork. His voice alternates between delirious hollering and reverential whispering:

CADAZIO
It's good! This is historic. I did it.
Open the champagne!

Corks pop, and the wait-staff sweep through the mingling crowd with trays of *coupes* and *canapés*. Cadazio approaches Rosenthaler.

CADAZIO
Why are you sitting in a wheelchair like an invalid? You should be dancing on the tables! It's a triumph!

SIMONE
He stabbed himself in the thigh with a palette knife last week, but, luckily, the infirmary-boy was able to reconnect the artery.

ROSENTHALER
(genuinely)
Do you like it?

CADAZIO
Do I like it?
(humbled)
Yes.

Cadazio leans down and kisses Rosenthaler on the forehead. He turns to Simone and kisses her, as well. The entire group of Splatter-school artists approaches. One of their companions speaks to Rosenthaler on their behalf:

PROSTITUTE
They did your girlfriend for you.

Each artist holds up a small portrait: a drawing on a napkin, a sketch on the exhibition program, a sculpture made from a champagne cork and its wire-cage, etc. Rosenthaler bows and mumbles thank-you's, moved and embarrassed (though not very impressed). Cadazio points:

CADAZIO

Look at "Maw". She's mesmerized.

Across the room, Clampette stands close to one of the panels, mesmerized, indeed. Berensen lingers some distance behind her. Cadazio approaches briskly and idles at her side. Clampette says, eventually, in the twang of her region:

CLAMPETTE

This here's a fresco, t'weren't it?

CADAZIO

(dazzled)

Precisely! He's a Renaissance master of the highest order! He mines the same vein as Piperno Pierluigi when he illuminated the Christ before God's heavenly altar in 1565! "Maw"! Nobody has an eye for things nobody has ever seen like "Maw" Clampette of Liberty, Kansas! We should be ashamed to even gather in her presence! Why the fuck did she say fresco?

(shouting at Rosenthaler)

Are they painted into the walls?

Cadazio reaches out to touch the picture. He rubs it more forcefully. He scratches and claws at it with the fingernails of both hands, grimacing in panic. He is thunder-struck.

CADAZIO

Oh, no. What has he done? You fucking asshole.

(desperately to Berensen)

Look at this.

BERENSEN

I think it's utterly wonderful.

CADAZIO

It's crucial! It's probably a turning point in the evolution of human pictography! Scratched and plastered into a reinforced cement aggregate gymnasium! He even painted on the radiators!

CLAMPETTE

(speculating)

Maybe one of them reterashun fellers out
(more)

CLAMPETTE (cont'd)

at the *Fondazione dell'Arte Classico*
could figger a way to rustle them
pitchers loose.

CADAZIO

We're in a maximum-security prison,
"Maw"! It's federal property! Even to
begin the bureaucratic nightmare would
require years of negotiation with a team
of highly-paid, arrogant, obnoxious
advocates. I don't even know how you'd
peel them off. It's a fresco.

Cadazio, abruptly, darts away and sails across the room to
confront Rosenthaler. He detonates:

CADAZIO

It's a fresco!

ROSENTHALER

(puzzled)

So what?

CADAZIO

Can you even begin to fathom the shit-ton
of money my uncles and I have squandered
to get to this point-of-no-return? Look
at them!

Cadazio points. His uncles watch and listen. They do not appear
to comprehend the situation on any level.

CADAZIO

You've ruined us! Does that mean nothing
to you?

ROSENTHALER

(injured)

I thought you liked it.

CADAZIO

(ruthlessly)

I think it stinks. Get out of that
wheelchair! I'm going to kick your ass up
and down this hobby-room!

Rosenthaler tenses and winces as if he has been, literally,
stabbed in the back. He growls (as before).

CADAZIO

Don't growl at me, you convicted
murderer. You homicidal, suicidal,
psychopathic, no-talent drunk!

Without rising, Rosenthaler charges Cadazio like a rolling rhinoceros, torquing his wheels with powerful force, kicking and lunging as Cadazio dodges and feints. Cadazio throws champagne into Rosenthaler's eyes, blinding him briefly, then darts behind the hulking artist and grabs the handles of his wheelchair. He shoves hard and sprint-pushes Rosenthaler, rumbling across the open gallery, launching the wheelchair and its passenger at speed directly off a three-step ledge. The wheelchair is airborne for an instant, then lands, skidding, with a thunk, and continues at high velocity directly into the cement center of one of the vast panels. It smashes with a cracking, metallic thud. The room goes dead silent. Rosenthaler is immobile.

Simone turns to Cadazio, stern. Cadazio looks sheepish.

Suddenly, Rosenthaler quick-reverses, spins around, and accelerates, bumpily rocketing back up the steps (with remarkable athleticism) and re-charging Cadazio like an even more ferocious rolling rhinoceros. Cadazio flees. The assembled guests watch, surprised, perplexed, amused, frightened, side-stepping as: the two combatants circle the perimeter of the room, screaming at each other furiously. As they whiz by Simone, she deftly extends her foot, tripping Cadazio into a tumbling spill, and, in almost the same instant, flips the hand-brake lever on the wheelchair, freezing the axles and obliterating the spokes. The vehicle, essentially, disintegrates as Rosenthaler ejects through space, landing heavily directly on top of his representative.

Cadazio, flat on his back, speaks up into Rosenthaler's face:

CADAZIO
Get off me, Moses.

The fight is over. Rosenthaler, hobbling, is assisted to a stool, onto which he crumples and wilts. Cadazio asks Simone, bewildered:

CADAZIO
Why didn't you tell me, *gardienne*?

Simone thinks for a minute. She starts to explain, then simplifies it:

SIMONE
Because you would've stopped him.

Cadazio deflates. He nods. He retreats among his uncles, who appear to be woozy and disoriented. Uncle Nick fans himself with an exhibition-program. Uncle Joe takes a tablet from a tin and washes it down with champagne. Cadazio says, heartbroken:

CADAZIO

We have to accept it. His need to fail is more powerful than our strongest desires to help him succeed. I give up. He's defeated us. It's sad, but there it is. Anyway, at least, he finished the mother-fucker.

(philosophical)

It is, perhaps, the most interesting contemplation of peripheral vision I've ever seen.

Cadazio shields his vision with his flat palm and pivots side to side, studying the work out of the corners of his eyes. As he returns to Rosenthaler, Rosenthaler throws open his arms, and the men embrace like two exhausted prizefighters. Tears stream down their faces.

CADAZIO

Well done, Moses. This has a greatness to it. If you plastered it deep enough, it may last. We'll come see it again one day. God willing. You'll, already, still be here, of course.

Rosenthaler shrugs. He says softly:

ROSENTHALER

It's all Simone.

They watch Simone, on the opposite side of the room, standing with her back to them, centered in front of another of the massive panels. Berensen informs us (from the future):

BERENSEN (V.O.)

At that moment, they were both aware of Simone's intention to leave her position at the Ennui Prison/Asylum the following day, endowed with funds provided by the Cadazios as compensation for her work as Rosenthaler's model and muse.

Cadazio puts his hand on Rosenthaler's shoulder.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

She was re-united with the estranged child to whom she had given birth in her youth, and the two never again lived apart.

Simone turns around to look at Rosenthaler and Cadazio. She smiles and imitates the pose -- albeit cubist -- implied in the painting: a runner at full stride, diving across an imaginary finish line. (Her balance, of course, is impossibly perfect.)

BERENSEN (V.O.)

She and Rosenthaler maintained a regular correspondence for the rest of the artist's life.

In the meantime: Clampette and Berensen carefully study the surfaces of one of the other panels. Berensen wears archivist's white cotton gloves as she assesses the qualities of the material.

BERENSEN

It's certainly an extremely challenging task. The medium appears to be grease and blood deep-permeated into a grain-based, seamless gesso. I think you'd have to take it whole.

CLAMPETTE

(optimistic)

I reckon that rascal Maurizio might fry up a s'looshin in his noggin. He's a crafty, old sidewinder.

BERENSEN

(taking a note in her agenda-book)

I'll contact him early tomorrow morning, "Maw".

Simone sits perched on the knee of Rosenthaler's good leg, darning another child's sock (of a somewhat larger size than previously-seen). Berensen glides over to Cadazio.

BERENSEN

Mrs. Clampette would like to put the piece on hold.

Cadazio's face goes blank and frozen. He mutters, stunned:

CADAZIO

The half-sticker?

BERENSEN

Yes, please. Should she choose to finalize the sale: will this amount be acceptable to you and your uncles?

Berensen hands Cadazio a slip of paper. He whisks on a pair of reading glasses. His uncles materialize to huddle around, peering over his shoulder. They murmur their approval. Cadazio asks Berensen:

CADAZIO

Can we get a deposit?

BERENSEN
 (calling out to Clampette)
 "Maw"? An advance against the total sum?

CLAMPETTE
 Tell them stingy Frenchmen I ain't making
 no promises.

Cadazio and his uncles appear to be, tentatively, relieved. Uncle Nick signals to the band. The music resumes, and the party revives.

BERENSEN (V.O.)
 "Ten Reinforced Cement Aggregate (Load-bearing) Murals" was to remain on hold under the name Upshur Clampette for the subsequent twenty years.

One of the wait-staff, hovering nearby, interjects confidentially:

WAIT-STAFF
 Mr. Cadazio? The prisoners are asking to be bribed, as well.

Cadazio hesitates. He asks, irritated:

CADAZIO
 Which prisoners?

WAIT-STAFF
 All of them. There's an angry mob outside the hobby-room. This individual claims to be their representative.

The wait-staff points to a wiry, scrappy, gristly, previously-unseen convict loitering at his side. Cadazio does a double-take and frowns. He says sharply, eye-balling the convict:

CADAZIO
 Tell them we don't bribe rapists and pick-pockets. It's unethical. Besides, I didn't bring an additional six million francs in small bills.

Cadazio strides to the door and pokes his head out. In the corridor, there is, indeed, an angry mob of approximately 300 prisoners holding improvised weapons (broom handles, pipe-sections, bricks and chains). Cadazio asks them rhetorically:

CADAZIO
 How'd you get out there?

Cadazio leans back inside and shouts to Rosenthaler:

CADAZIO

What do we do?

ROSENTHALER

(grimly)

Lock the door.

Cadazio attempts to re-slam the door, but the convict resists and grapples with him. Simone baton-whomps him on the top of his head with all her might. Blood spurts as the convict yelps and bellows in a thundering baritone:

CONVICT

Riot!

Iron hinges shoot off in three directions as if blasted apart by explosive charges, and the hobby-room door whangs flat onto the floor with a boom. The mob stampedes into the art exhibition: berserk, blood-thirsty, and spectacularly out of control. The assembled guests, screaming and scrambling, attempt to defend themselves.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

In the aftermath, 72 prisoners and six members of the French Splatter-school lay dead or mortally wounded.

Simone continues to baton-whomp numerous convicts. Cadazio smashes a champagne bottle and jabs it into the faces of various attackers. Clampette produces a Derringer pistol, shoots two men dead, and reloads. Berensen discharges a high-pressure fire extinguisher into the melee. The artists and their prostitutes fight like sailors. Cadazio's uncles struggle to prevent themselves from being strangled to death.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

Moses Rosenthaler, for acts of extreme valor which saved the lives of nine guards, twenty-two distinguished visitors, and the Ministers of Culture and Urbanity, received his freedom (with probation for life) --

For the first time in the evening, Rosenthaler unsteadily rises to his feet. In one hand: a large can of red paint (pigeon blood). In the other: a bottle of turpentine. Again: he growls.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

-- and was decorated in the Order of the Caged Lion.

Close-up: Rosenthaler swigs the turpentine, throws the bottle aside, pours the full can of paint over the top of his head,

lights a match, and roars, berserk (splattering: people, painting, and camera). He spits, breathing fire.

EXT. CARGO PLANE. DAY

A military aircraft in flight over the Atlantic Ocean (right to left). Clouds wisp by in the background as we dissolve to a cut-away view of the interior of the vessel. In the massive rear-cabin: an army tank, a troop carrier, three jeeps, and the entire hobby-room, intact, suspended from the ceiling trusses on a net-cradle. It sways slightly in the mild turbulence.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

One score later, as per "Maw" Clampette's detailed instructions, Cadazio and his own nephew arranged for the entirety of the hobby-room to be relocated onboard a Goliath Aviation twelve-engine artillery transport directly from Ennui to Liberty.

Side by side in jump-seats with four-point harnesses and parachute backpacks: a gently aging Cadazio and his bright, eager, young relation.

CUT TO:

The hobby-room. Berensen and the audience from her lecture have gathered inside the transplanted structure to view Rosenthaler's creation. Outside the open doorway: a corn field rustles in the prairie breeze.

BERENSEN (V.O.)

In this form, the *avant-garde* assumed its place upon the plains of Central Kansas.

INT. WRITER'S OFFICE (BERENSEN). DAY

At the window: Berensen studies slides and re-orders them in a carousel tray. In the corner: the accountant makes notations on slips and tickets. In the middle of the room: Howitzer paces, shuffling a sheaf of receipts, muttering/quoting under his breath:

HOWITZER

"Pencils, pens, erasers, thumbtacks, pushpins, typewriter repairman..."

Howitzer interrupts himself, looking over his glasses at Berensen:

HOWITZER

Why am I paying for a hotel room at a beach club on the North Atlantic coast?

BERENSEN
(slightly offended)
Because I had to go there to write it.

Howitzer grumbles, unconvinced. He shuffles more receipts and resumes his muttering/quoting:

HOWITZER
"Breakfast, lunch, dinner, laundry,
nightcap, midnight snack..."

Howitzer interrupts himself (looking over his glasses) again:

HOWITZER
What's wrong with the desk right here? In
your office, courtesy of this magazine.

BERENSEN
(slightly more offended)
Don't ask me to be indiscreet. About what
happened between me and Moses at a
seaside inn twenty years ago. We were
lovers. I went back to remember.

HOWITZER
(pause)
On my dime.

BERENSEN
(firmly)
Yes, please.

Howitzer grumbles once more. He says to the accountant,
resigned:

HOWITZER
Add it up.

The accountant totals the figures on her adding machine.

Story #2
(pages 59 to 96)

INSERT:

The proof-print of a correspondent's diary in the Politics/Poetry Section. A line-drawing depicts a Citroën economy-car, vandalized and on fire.

TITLE:

Youth Movement
 "Revisions to a Manifesto"
 by Lucinda Krementz

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE. NIGHT

A paneled room of generous proportions with high ceilings and a vast, ancient table at its center. Seated across from each other, cross-legged, in the middle of the desktop: a middle-aged professor (tall, distinguished, rigid) and a nineteen-year-old boy (skinny, wild-haired, electric). They both stare intently at, situated between them: a chessboard. The professor keeps his fingers on a bishop while he re-thinks. The boy (Zeffirelli) puffs on a dark, skinny, Tuscan cigar. The room overflows all around with a hundred students and a dozen faculty, standing on cabinets, sitting on floors, crouched on windowsills, spilling into the corridors and vestibules. All stare at the two players, mid-match.

A voice (American, chain-smoker, low [for a woman]) begins:

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

March first. Negotiations between undergraduates and the university administration break down abruptly in early-morning hours after clamorous debate, angry name-calling, and, finally, outright gambling over: the right of free-access to the girls dormitory for all male students.

In the corner: two boys (a giraffe and a fire-hydrant) whisper simultaneously. They are Vittel and Mitch-mitch.

VITTEL

Zeffirelli's cramping the professor's bishop.

MITCH-MITCHE

He should open the position and counter with both rooks.

At the chessboard, the professor releases his bishop and taps a game clock. Zeffirelli makes a brisk move, knight to bishop etc, and taps the timer himself.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

The protest (which ended in a stalemate) gave the superficial appearance of a vanity exercise for the pimple-cream and
 (more)

KREMENTZ (V.O.) (cont'd)

wet-dream contingent; but, in fact, the sexes were equally represented, and all participants emphasized the basis of their frustration: a desire (more: a biological need) for freedom, full-stop.

Discreetly seated on the top shelf of a bookcase in a corner, a sensible, fifty-year-old woman (skirt-suit, pearls, trench coat, large handbag) watches, listens, smokes a cigarette, and takes notes in a composition book. She is deeply curious, deeply engaged, entertained/amused. She is Lucinda Krementz. She frowns, then yells:

KREMENTZ

Young lady: shoes!

Across the room: a student in a turtleneck sweater, uniform smock, long socks with sandals, and checker-striped motorcycle helmet (worn at all times throughout the story) is standing on the hem of a tapestry (knights, ladies, lions, unicorn) while she checks her make-up in a powder-puff compact mirror. She looks down at her feet, mortified. She carefully steps off the draped cloth and neatens it. She looks back to Krementz and sticks out her tongue. She is Juliette. Krementz raises an eyebrow. At the table: the professor thwarts an attack on the queen's flank. Various quarters of the room cheer and grumble.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

It has exploded into symbolism, and everybody's talking about it.

INT. DINING ROOM. NIGHT

A comfortable fifth-floor flat cluttered with books and papers. Seated at a futuristic, white, round table over a spotless, white, round rug: a forty-ish couple. The husband wears a pullover sweater and long sideburns. The wife wears a caftan and long braids. In the background: twin girls, thirteen, eat alone in the kitchen, listening to a news report on the radio. Krementz faces her friends, chilly, as the husband twists a corkscrew.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

March fifth. Late supper at the B's. Eldest boy, nineteen, not home since yesterday morning. Father chanced upon him, mid-day, marching alongside his comrades. Their slogan:

CUT TO:

A stone wall. Spray-paint graffitied onto it: "*Les Enfants sont Grognons.*"

KREMENTZ (V.O.)
 "The children are grumpy."

CUT TO:

Krementz lighting a cigarette as the wine is poured. She says, matter-of-fact:

KREMENTZ
 I'll be needing an ashtray, if you care
 about this carpet.

The husband moves briskly to fetch a receptacle. The wife, sheepish, sits in silence. Kremenz looks up coolly at a not-entirely-successful chandelier.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)
 Local news reports: fascist law students,
 loitering at the university gates with
 intent to harass left-wing demonstrators
 (their natural enemies), instead, brawl
 in their defense when police forces move
 to break up the demonstration.

The husband delivers an oversized, crystal bowl (which appears to weigh about ten pounds) and clunks it onto the table under Kremenz's cigarette just as ashes begin to crumble.

KREMENTZ
 Thank you.

Krementz exhales a stream of smoke as the husband slides back into his seat, uneasy.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)
 An additional dinner guest, thus far,
 fails to appear. For this, I am grateful.
 (Had not been informed of his invitation,
 in first place.)

The husband and wife respond simultaneously, finishing each other's sentences:

HUSBAND
 We didn't mean to offend you.
 We're sorry.

WIFE
 We thought you might decline
 the invitation. If we warned
 you.

KREMENTZ
 You were right.

Faintly, outside: shouting, chanting, a periodic ricochet-pop.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)
 Medical student on Radio-Ennui describes
 aggressive crowd-control methods in use
 on street today. Quote:

WIFE	HUSBAND
Just give him a chance. He's very intelligent.	How long's it been? Since what's-his-name?

KREMENTZ
 (patient)
 I know you mean well.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)
 "It begins with a prickly tingling of the
 exposed skin."

Strangely: Kremenz and the couple -- all three, at once --
 reach not for their wine but, instead, glasses of water. They
 each drink a quick, solid gulp. As soon as Kremenz swallows:

KREMENTZ
 I'm not an old maid.

HUSBAND	WIFE
We don't think that.	Of course, you're not.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)
 "Then: a reddening and swelling of the
 orbital muscles."

All three begin to blink, squint, and sniffle.

KREMENTZ
 Take me at my word: I live by myself on
 purpose. I prefer relationships that end.
 I deliberately choose to have neither
 husband nor children (the two greatest
 deterrents to any woman's attempt to live
 by and for writing). Why are we crying?

HUSBAND	WIFE
Because it's sad. We don't want you to be alone.	Loneliness is a kind of poverty.

KREMENTZ
 I'm not sad. My eyes hurt. There's
 something wrong with your apartment.

Pause. At the same instant: Kremenz and her hosts begin to
 cough, choke, and rub their eyes. The noise in the streets has
 now erupted into a rumbling, clattering roar, punctuated by
 megaphone shouts and a mixture of sirens.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

"Finally: a barrage of searing pain as snot pours from the nostrils, and the throat spasms and constricts."

HUSBAND

Spread a damp cloth on every windowsill.

WIFE

I can't believe it reaches us up here. On the fifth floor.

The husband stands up and moves toward the curtains as a bright light flashes outside. Distant thumps reverberate. The wife goes into the kitchen to sweep the girls down the back corridor. Kremenz puts a napkin to her face and drifts across the apartment, into a bathroom. She closes the door.

INT. BATHROOM. NIGHT

White tiles, dangling towels, a family of toothbrushes. Kremenz glares at herself in the mirror. Her eyes are blood-shot. Her mascara is smudged. She turns on the tap and watches the water run. Behind her: a subtle splash. She frowns. A pair of bare feet balanced on the rim of the end of the tub shift and wiggle. Kremenz crosses the room and whisks the shower curtain fully open with a jingling tug. Zeffirelli, soaking, turbaned in terrycloth, smoking another skinny cigar, looks shocked. He holds a graph-paper notebook and a four-color ballpoint pen poised mid-sentence. Pause.

ZEFFIRELLI

I'm naked, Mrs. Kremenz.

KREMENTZ

I can see that.

ZEFFIRELLI

Why are you crying?

KREMENTZ

Tear gas.

Zeffirelli sniffs the air. Kremenz quietly realizes and/or acknowledges:

KREMENTZ

Also, I suppose I'm sad.

Zeffirelli nods, thoughtful. He and Kremenz lock eyes for a moment.

ZEFFIRELLI

Please, turn away. I feel shy about my new muscles.

Krementz jerks the shower curtain shut again. She goes back to the sink, searches in the medicine cabinet, and finds a tube of mascara. She fixes her eyes.

KREMENTZ

Go tell your parents you're home. They're worried.

ZEFFIRELLI (O.S.)

I'm expected back on the barricades.

KREMENTZ

(skeptical)

I didn't see any barricades.

ZEFFIRELLI (O.S.)

(hedging)

Well, we're still constructing them.

KREMENTZ

(evenly)

Uh-huh. What are you writing?

Zeffirelli slings the shower curtain open again. He holds up his notebook and says vigorously:

ZEFFIRELLI

Our manifesto. I told them not to invite Paul, by the way. Maybe you're sad, but you don't seem lonely to me.

KREMENTZ

(vindicated)

Exactly!

ZEFFIRELLI

I saw you at the protest. On top of a bookcase (taking notes).

(tantalized)

Is there a story in us? For the people of Kansas.

KREMENTZ

(pause)

Maybe.

ZEFFIRELLI

(re: his manifesto)

Then you should study our resolutions. Or, anyway, will you proofread it? My parents think you're a good writer.

KREMENTZ

Give it to me.

Zeffirelli jolts up out of the tub, splashing and naked, lunges across the bathroom, thrusts the graph-paper notebook into Kremenz's hands, then darts away and slips back into the water. Kremenz opens the notebook and reads, frowning, flipping pages. Outside the room: a doorbell rings, a dog barks. Kremenz says, skeptical:

KREMENTZ
It's a little damp.

ZEFFIRELLI
(hesitates)
Physically? Or metaphorically.

KREMENTZ
Both. Based on the cover --
(water-stained)
-- and the first four sentences.

ZEFFIRELLI
(offended)
Don't criticize my manifesto.

KREMENTZ
(raising an eyebrow)
Oh. You don't want remarks?

ZEFFIRELLI
(less certain)
I don't need remarks. Do I? I only asked you to proofread it because I thought you'd be even more impressed by how good it already is.

KREMENTZ
Let's start with the typos.

ZEFFIRELLI
(squinting)
What's there?

Kremenz produces a red felt-tip pen and immediately begins grading the document like a book report. Zeffirelli watches tensely.

CUT TO:

Kremenz emerging with the graph-paper notebook in hand. A tall, wispy-bearded, blond man in corduroy waits, seated, with the couple at the table. He immediately rises to his feet. It is clear: the journey from wherever he has come from has been difficult. His sleeve is ripped. His shirt is torn. There is a small bandage on his forehead. He is dusty, mussed, and bruised. He smiles, reserved. He is Paul. Kremenz nods:

KREMENTZ

Hi.

HUSBAND
Paul Duval.

WIFE
Lucinda Krementz.

PAUL
(bowing slightly)
How do you do?

Krementz stiffens as Paul kisses her on both cheeks.

KREMENTZ
Your beard is scratching me.

Paul withdraws slightly. Krementz tucks herself back into the group. Paul sits, then holds forth at some length while Krementz continues in voiceover:

KREMENTZ (V.O.)
Unexpected guest finally arrives. Looks like hell. Describes odyssey across city: stalled trains, stalled buses, broken windows, paving stones flying in all directions.

The girls, back in the kitchen, now in pajamas with the shirts pulled up over their noses, raise the volume on the radio. The husband refills glasses. The wife passes around a bowl of radishes. Paul, in the meantime, summarizes:

PAUL
Can the faculty succeed if the students fail? It remains to be seen. Anyway:
(changing gears)
Here we are. The famous Lucinda. Hello.

Paul smiles. Krementz says bluntly, signaling "stop":

KREMENTZ
I didn't know you were coming. They didn't tell me. This is not an official meeting.

Paul hesitates. He looks to the husband and wife. They murmur, uneasy. Krementz suddenly clutches her pearls, rolls back her eyes, makes a gurgling sound, mock-suffocating, then plunks her face down on a plate and plays dead. Paul opens his mouth and pauses. The husband looks up at the ceiling. The wife looks down at the table. The bathroom door opens again, and Zeffirelli enters. He now wears a transparent rain slicker over his clothes and a gas-mask over his face. His voice echoes inside the breathing-device:

ZEFFIRELLI

Good evening.

The husband and wife are, momentarily, speechless. Zeffirelli offers a second gas-mask to Kremenz. She stands up, puts it on, and reverbs to her hosts:

KREMENTZ

Start without me.

Kremenz follows Zeffirelli out through the *salon*. Off-screen: the apartment's front door opens and shuts. Paul, puzzled, and the couple, angry/humiliated/worried, remain at the table in uneasy silence. The girls, watching from the kitchen, snicker under their pajama shirts.

INT. WALK-UP APARTMENT. DAY

A narrow bedroom on a high floor. Kremenz (in a rose *peignoir*) sits up in bed eating burnt toast, reading from her composition book, and rapid-transcribing on a portable typewriter balanced across her knees. Zeffirelli, beside her on the mattress, naked (as usual), flips manifesto-pages, bristling at the numerous, red correction-marks. She smokes a cigarette, he smokes another skinny cigar.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

March tenth.

Zeffirelli does a double-take. He points across the room and says false-modestly:

ZEFFIRELLI

Me, again.

Kremenz looks up.

INSERT:

A small, black and white television set on a rolling cart at the foot of the bed. On screen: an anchorman delivers a bulletin, then introduces footage -- subtitled: "Last Night" -- of a battalion of riot-police (billy-clubs and plastic shields) facing off against a legion of student protesters (paving stones and broken bottles). On a plastic crate in the small space between the two transfixed, opposing groups: another chessboard. In a sudden burst of attack/counter-attack, Zeffirelli and a riot-police commander trade pawns, bishops, rooks, etc. then pause. (A superimposed chessboard diagram re-caps the moves that lead up to this caesura.)

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

City services at a halt, one week and counting. Public transportation:

(more)

KREMENTZ (V.O.) (cont'd)

suspended. Piles of garbage: uncollected.
Schools on strike. No mail, no milk.

Zeffirelli moves his queen diagonally seven spaces to capture the queen of his rival. The collected military personnel and young radicals gasp in unison, grimace, groan, and whisper nervously. (A flashbulb pops.) Zeffirelli says discreetly:

ZEFFIRELLI

Check.

The riot-police commander, unfazed, protects his king with an unforeseen, defensive side-step. Zeffirelli, surprised, nods with guarded admiration. (A super-title blinks: "Stalemate!")

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

What will normal reality be? Next week, next month, whenever (if ever) we get the chance to experience it again. Anyone's guess. Impossible to imagine these students (exhilarated, naive, brave in the extreme) returning to their obedient classrooms.

Krementz looks to Zeffirelli. He has resumed bristling over her corrections. He points:

ZEFFIRELLI

What's this part?

Krementz leans over and squints to study the page.

KREMENTZ

I added an appendix.

ZEFFIRELLI

(in disbelief)

You're joking.

KREMENTZ

(innocent)

No, I'm not.

ZEFFIRELLI

(appalled)

You finished my manifesto? Without me.

KREMENTZ

I made it sound like you, I think. Just more clear, more concise, a bit less poetic. Put it this way: this isn't the first manifesto I've proofread.

Zeffirelli is insulted. The doorbell rings. Kremenz gets out of bed, leaves the room, and closes the door behind her. Muffled voices echo through the wall/door. Zeffirelli frowns, anxious. He strains to eavesdrop. He bites a fingernail. Kremenz comes back in and returns to the bed. Zeffirelli stares at her, waiting. Finally:

ZEFFIRELLI

Who was that?

KREMENTZ

Your mother.

ZEFFIRELLI

(agitated)

My mother? What'd she want? Did you tell her I was here?

KREMENTZ

Yes.

ZEFFIRELLI

(stunned)

Why?

KREMENTZ

(simply)

Because she asked. I don't lie.

ZEFFIRELLI

(worried)

Was she upset?

KREMENTZ

I don't think so.

ZEFFIRELLI

(doubtful)

What'd she say?

KREMENTZ

She nodded.

ZEFFIRELLI

(hesitates)

What'd you say?

KREMENTZ

I told her I was working on an article about you and your friends.

ZEFFIRELLI

(intrigued)

So you are.

KREMENTZ

(shrugs)

I've already written a thousand words. I asked to interview her.

ZEFFIRELLI

(disoriented)

Did she agree?

KREMENTZ

Of course.

ZEFFIRELLI

(very agitated)

Well, I am upset. I don't know how to feel. Am I in trouble? Why would my mother be so calm? Is it proper? This is all off the record. Everything. My whole life.

(vulnerable)

What am I supposed to do now?

KREMENTZ

(pause)

I should maintain journalistic neutrality.

Long pause. Zeffirelli says genuinely (perhaps growing up ever so slightly in this moment):

ZEFFIRELLI

I like how ruthless you are. It's part of your beauty, I think. You've got a thousand words already?

Krementz nods, flattered, and points at the page in her typewriter. Zeffirelli peers at it. Kremetz covers it with her hand. Zeffirelli returns to his manifesto. Kremetz types one more short paragraph.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

The kids did this. Obliterated a thousand years of republican authority in less than a fortnight. How and why? Before it began: where did it begin?

INT. STUDENT CAFÉ. NIGHT

The front room of the *Sans Blague* bubbles over with caffeinated/inebriated twenty-year-olds chattering shoulder to shoulder along counters, booths, and banquettes. Classical music blasts on the jukebox. A crowd hovers over a pinball machine decorated with question marks, infinity symbols, atoms/molecules and the caption: "Modern Physics!" A waiter speed-navigates

through the circus with a rattling tray triple-tiered with double-espressos extended high above his head.

(Note: each young patron of the café carries a highbrow/semi-unreadable paperback of some variety at all times without exception.)

TITLE:

Last Spring

Zeffirelli assumes the narration:

ZEFFIRELLI (V.O.)

It was another time, it was another Ennui. Must be nearly six months ago, I guess. (My sisters were still twelve, anyway.)

INSERT:

An illuminated jukebox title-strip labeled G-7: "Dansez le 'Craze'". Zeffirelli continues in voiceover:

ZEFFIRELLI (V.O.)

You danced the Craze and the *Lait Chaud*.

MONTAGE:

A hiss, a scratch, then the first note of a French pop-instrumental (an uptempo, beepy/jingly fugue). The camera dollies among undergraduates with brush-cuts, mop-tops, pageboys, and frizzy perms. The boys wear topcoats, two button tweeds, and skinny high-waters. The girls wear knitted mini-dresses, ballet flats, and leotards.

ZEFFIRELLI (V.O.)

You wore your hair-do in the Pompidou, the Crouton, or the *Fruits-de-Mer*.

A standing foursome of boys and girls talk simultaneously in gibberish. One makes a symbolic hand shape followed by a wiggling gesture. The others laugh.

ZEFFIRELLI (V.O.)

Your slang mixed bits of Latin with philosophy jargon and manual signaling.

A balustraded, low-ceilinged mezzanine-loge at the top of a spiral staircase. The *menu du jour* specials on the wall-chalkboard have been rubbed out and carefully vandalized into: "French Tongue on Shit Sandwich." Juliette (seen earlier standing on the tapestry in the dean's office) sits at a table

checking her make-up in her compact mirror as she addresses a pack of admirers/detractors.

ZEFFIRELLI (V.O.)

Devil's advocates bickered and debated perpetually, *ad nauseum*, only for the sake of argument:

JULIETTE

I couldn't disagree more.

Pairs of opposing cliques go head to head at backgammon, Risk, and crossword puzzles; vie at competitive domino toppling (winding/climbing/fanning arrangements which click-clack their way through the café doing tricks with matchsticks, shoelaces, and sparkling water); and -- here we see Zeffirelli, Vittel, and Mitch-mitch each at a separate board/game -- play chess.

ZEFFIRELLI (V.O.)

Every clique had a rival. The Nuts had the Bolts. The Sticks had the Stones. The Jocks had us: the Bookworms --

Mitch-mitch, listless and distracted, re-reads a well-creased letter, then moves a pawn and taps the game-clock timer. His opponent immediately takes the piece. Pause.

ZEFFIRELLI (V.O.)

-- until Mitch-mitch failed the baccalaureate and got sent down to National Duty Obligation (three months in the Mustard Region).

Mitch-mitch tips over his king, crumples his letter, pulls on his topcoat, and leaves the table. He re-enters frame outside the plate-glass window (late afternoon, drizzle), lighting a cigarette as he jogs through criss-crossing traffic before descending into the Flop Quarter Métro station.

Zeffirelli watches from his chessboard, concerned. He looks to Vittel. Vittel shrugs. Zeffirelli snatches up the crumpled paper from Mitch-mitch's table and unfolds it.

INSERT:

An official summons red-stamped on flimsy, blue card-stock. Across the top: Report for Compulsory Martial Chores.

CUT TO:

Night. Two tables frown at each other from corners of the front-room. Juliette checks her make-up in her compact mirror.

TITLE:

One Month Later

JULIETTE

Where were his principles when he agreed to fight on behalf of an imperialist army in an unjust war of totalitarian aggression?

ZEFFIRELLI

(in disbelief)

He got sent to the Mustard Region. For National Duty-obligation.

VITTEL

It's required.

JULIETTE

(confident)

It's the same.

ZEFFIRELLI

How dare you? Who gave you permission to besmirch our friend? Does it occur to you: he's very probably marching in the middle of the night right now carrying a fifty-pound sack of gun-powder and peeling stale potatoes while he digs a latrine trench in the rain with a tin cup? He doesn't want to be in the military.

VITTEL

It's required!

JULIETTE

He should burn the patch and desert his post.

A general gasp: conversation in the rest of the café has fallen silent, and everyone is listening to the Mitch-mitch debate. A whispered aside from a pre-law student at another table:

SMART GIRL

Minimum punishment: six-months sentence and a Black Mark in permanent ink.

Zeffirelli, recovering from the affront, snaps back at Juliette:

ZEFFIRELLI

That's easy for you to say. From the comfort of the *Sans Blague*.

JULIETTE
 (confident)
 It's the same.

A new voice interrupts off-screen:

MITCH-MITCH (O.S.)
 For once: she's right.

Everyone turns. Mitch-mitch is standing alone in the open doorway at the end of the crowded bar, in front of the crowded *terrasse*. He is dressed in a long, blue, floor-length cape, a navy beret, and blue commando trousers tucked into muddy combat-boots. He carries an enormous blue-camo duffel-sack over his shoulder. The eyes of every customer are now glued to him. Zeffirelli stammers then finds his tongue:

ZEFFIRELLI
 Mitch-mitch, what are you doing here?
 You're supposed to be in the Mustard
 Region for another two months.

In close-up: Mitch-mitch is a wounded soldier (psychologically). Kremenz returns in voiceover with the following information:

KREMENTZ (V.O.)
 Five years later, I, myself, translated
 Mitch-mitch Simca's poetic interpretation
 of his National Duty Obligation service
 (the flashback scene in Act II of
 "Goodbye, Zeffirelli").

INT. CADET BARRACKS. NIGHT

A cement-box garrison dormitory dimly lit from the flies. Three-tiered bunkbeds delineate the upstage backdrop (cinder block and timber joist). Downstage, left: an industrial drum-heater idles, bubbling. Downstage, right: a five seat latrine with noisy pipes. A single, bare lightbulb hangs, suspended, above centerstage.

On cots and footlockers: eighteen cadets in white boxer shorts, tucked-in white undershirts, and shower slippers. A drill-sergeant, dressed in the same garments with the addition of a white *kepi* and gun-belt, leans on a bunk ladder, sipping from a plastic mess-kit teacup. He speaks at a stage-whisper to the rapt troop:

DRILL-SERGEANT
 In North Africa, I caught a bullet in the
 tail; in South America, I caught a chunk
 of high-explosives shrapnel in the left
 wing; in East Asia, I picked up a rare,
 microbial, infectious gut-parasite in the
 (more)

DRILL-SERGEANT (cont'd)

lower abdominal cavity -- and I've got them all with me right now, still in my body: but I don't regret my choice to wear this uniform --

The drill-sergeant motions across his costume (as indicated, his skivvies).

DRILL-SERGEANT

-- and, in sixteen years, I'll get my pension.

(checks watch)

Well, that's your bedtime story, ladies.
Lights out!

The cadets scramble to their bunks, shouting a ritual of call-and-response/nighttime orders ("Hup! Ho! Hut!" "Lights out! Blankets on!" "Covers tucked! Eyes shut! Pray your prayers!"), followed by a general murmur of grateful, holy, reverential, hushed muttering, signs-of-crossings, and "Amens" -- then silence. (The drill-sergeant ascends a spiral staircase and retires to an upstairs desk and cot seen only in silhouette against a glowing, white rectangle.)

A top-bunk cadet rustles under his sheets.

CADET #1

Psst.

Long pause. The top-bunk cadet rustles again and props himself up on an elbow.

CADET #1

Psst. Mitch-mitch. Psst.

Pause, again. The top-bunk cadet sits up fully.

CADET #1

Psst. Mitch-mitch. What do you want to be?

Mitch-mitch (portrayed in this scene by a theatre-actor with well-trained "instrument"), one bunk-tier below, leans out, reluctant/annoyed.

MITCH-MITCH

What?

CADET #1

What do you want to be, Mitch-mitch?

Mitch-mitch sighs. As he answers, resigned, the rest of the cadets creep out of their cots and return to their earlier positions, listening.

MITCH-MITCH

With my grades? I'll be an assistant-pharmacist.

CADET #2

Will that make you be satisfied?

MITCH-MITCH

(evenly)

It won't depress me. I should've studied harder.

CADET #1

And you, Robouchon?

CADET #3

I have no choice. I'll work for my father's glass factory. Someone has to take over.

CADET #1

It's normal.

CADET #2

Vaugirard. What's your plan?

CADET #4

I suppose, I'll continue to be an attractive wastrel, like my cousins on both sides of the family.

CADET #1

Your cousins are the best.

CADET #3

I love your cousins.

MITCH-MITCH

(pause)

What about you, Morisot?

No answer. Mitch-mitch repeats the question:

MITCH-MITCH

Morisot? What do you want to be?

Morisot, bespectacled, timid, pale, answers softly from the bottom bunk:

MORISOT

A protester.

CADET #1

(hesitates)

What'd he say?

CADET #2
He said, "A protester."

CADET #3
(puzzled)
What does he mean?

CADET #1
I don't know.

CADET #4
(doubtful)
I thought Morisot was going to be a
professor of geological chemistry.

Mitch-mitch cranes upside-down to examine Morisot. He says,
surprised:

MITCH-MITCH
Morisot's crying.

A voice in the darkness, across the room, hushes sharply:

VOICE
Shhh!

Cadet #1 bolts up on his knees. He shout-whispers, angry:

CADET #1
Who said, "Shhh!"

Silence. Morisot speaks again, quiet but determined:

MORISOT
I won't do it.

MITCH-MITCH
(uncertain)
It's only eight more weeks, Morisot.
Before we complete the program.

MORISOT
I don't mean the program. I mean from
when we go home until retirement age.
That 48-year period of my life, I mean.
That's what I won't do. I can no longer
envision myself as a grown-up man in our
parents' world.

Morisot slides open the window next to his cot, and discreetly
slips out into the night. A beat, then a sickening thud. Mitch-
mitch gasps, astonished, and shouts:

MITCH-MITCH

Morisot!

Mitch-mitch drops and tucks into Morisot's bunk. He screams, pained:

MITCH-MITCH

He went out the window!

Other cadets scramble to join Mitch-mitch as he sticks his head out and looks down.

CADET #1

Is he dead?

MITCH-MITCH

I don't know.

CADET #2

How far did he fall?

MITCH-MITCH

Five floors with high ceilings.

CADET #3

It rained last night. Maybe the mud's still soft.

MITCH-MITCH

He's not moving.

The stage-lights begin to slowly, slowly dim as Mitch-mitch's voice, diminishing in volume, softer and softer, repeats:

MITCH-MITCH

He's still not moving.

(pause)

He's still not moving.

(pause)

He's still not moving.

(pause)

He's still not moving.

(pause)

He's still not moving.

CUT TO:

The café, exactly as we left it. Mitch-mitch crosses the silent room to join his friends. Zeffirelli, confused and moved, stands up and kisses Mitch-mitch on both cheeks. Mitch-mitch embraces Zeffirelli. He turns to face the larger group. He steps up onto a chair and points to a tricolor patch on his chest the shape of a shield which depicts a flying bullet and the words: Mustard Region Cadets. He says simply:

MITCH-MITCH

I can no longer salute this patch.

Mitch-mitch rips off the patch and ignites it with a Zippo. The room (including Juliette) gasps again. Zeffirelli, stunned, mouth open, begins to slowly clap. Juliette joins him. Vittel claps faster. A wave of thunderous applause spreads through the room.

ZEFFIRELLI (V.O.)

The next morning Mitch-mitch was arrested for Desertion and Desecration, and the *Sans Blague* became headquarters for the Movement of Young Idealists for the Revolutionary Overthrow of Reactionary Neo-liberal Society.

Above the jukebox: Juliette pulls down a glossy headshot of a heartthrob (blue eyes, bronze skin, golden hair) taped to a mirrored-wall and starts to replace it with a glossy headshot of a public intellectual (round spectacles, woolen scarf, pipe). Zeffirelli, edgy, pops up at her side:

ZEFFIRELLI

What are you doing?

JULIETTE

Replacing Tip-top with François-Marie Charvet.

ZEFFIRELLI

(stupefied)

They can live together. Tip-top with Charvet.

JULIETTE

Tip-top is a commodity represented by a record company owned by a conglomerate controlled by a bank subsidized by a bureaucracy sustaining the puppet-leadership of a satellite stooge-government. For every note he sings, a peasant must die in West Africa.

Zeffirelli, stony, drops in a twenty-centime coin and punches two buttons. Another hit French single (high-tenor vocals and expansive, orchestral backing) gusts into the room. Spinning lights circle. Immediately: the café is dancing -- and, at the chorus, singing, *fortissimo*, in unison with "Tip-top".

Zeffirelli and Juliette stare at each other coolly, then drift apart into their respective crowds. Kremetz resumes the role of narrator:

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

There followed: a brisk, unpredictable tit-for-tat between Ennui's elders and its youngsters.

From one corner: Juliette watches Zeffirelli reflected in her compact mirror. From the opposite: Zeffirelli studies Juliette in a reflection of a reflection of an angled ceiling-mirror. He puffs on his skinny cigar.

MONTAGE:

The *cour* of a dilapidated residential hotel. A thick-set *gardienne* framed in the upper-section of a Dutch door gossips darkly with an amiable *gendarme* and a group of elderly, intrigued neighbors (eye-doctor sunglasses, mesh grocery-sacks).

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

August. Community whisper-campaign denounces student movement.

An *impasse* alongside the *Sans Blague*. A squad of disorderly police-goons dumps barrels of coffee beans into a sewer-canal.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

September. *Sans Blague* coffee-license revoked by official decree.

A mansard platform on a tall building above the *quai*. Vittel and two other headphoned student disc-jockeys with cigarettes in their mouths speed-talk at a microphone inside a tiny, ramshackle transmission booth next to a jerry-rigged broadcasting tower twenty feet high.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

October. Propaganda Committee erects pirate-radio tower on Physics Department rooftop.

A long, formica-top table in a kitchen with tiled walls and hanging copper pots and pans. Two dozen grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins eat slices of an enormous, thin *galette* the size of a bicycle wheel. Mitch-mitch, in pajamas, wears a paper gold-foil crown on his head.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

November. Mitch-mitch released to parental custody.

An idle librarian staring into space. Behind her: rows and aisles of shelves, stacks, racks, carts -- all completely empty and desolate.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

December. Check-out Protest at the *Bibliothèque Principale* (entire library circulation legally removed until five minutes before incur of massive overdue-book fines).

The steps of the university lunchroom. A line of students, arms-linked, lunch-trays brandished like shields, obstructs a bank of entrance-doors.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

January. Meal-plan Blockade of the undergraduate cafeteria.

The facade of a student-housing *pension*. Female students in crowded windows lower improvised ropes down to male students hanging from the ledges below.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

February. The Girls Dormitory Uprising.
It all, in the end, leads to --

EXT. WIDE BOULEVARD. EVENING

One half-block of a paving-stone avenue between and below facing banks of imposing, cut-stone apartment buildings. On one end: a barricade of school-desks, chairs, bookcases, globes, microscopes, and typewriters piled fifteen feet high. On the other end: compact cars, burned black, still smoldering, on their sides, upside-down, standing on end, split in two, etc. On opposing flanks: two cafés, the *Fleurs du Mal* and the *Americain*. A thread of gutter-water runs down the center of the road like a stream through a canyon. Métro station: Bootblack District.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

-- March: the Chessboard Revolution.

Student protestors sit in clusters on the piled rubble and mutilated cars; crouch on and dangle from storefront awnings and ledges; direct traffic (one of them, anyway). Innocent bystanders (old and young) stand on balconies and in open windows; wait on tables and eat/drink at the *terrasses* of the two cafés; pose for a tourist-family picture (T-shirt: "Liberty Junior High Boys Track"). A platoon of riot-police stands in formation beyond the barricade, fifty meters down the street. Mitch-mitch and Vittel occupy the middle of the improvised barrier -- near Juliette, who sits perched alone on the top of a folding ladder. Each (protesters, bystanders, riot-police) holds a pale pink pamphlet with "*Le Sans Blague: a Manifesto*" sloganed across its letter-pressed cover. They all read intently, periodically turning pages.

Zeffirelli, anxious, lingers among his comrades, attending their reactions (especially Juliette's). He fidgets with his skinny cigar. A voice booms over a loudspeaker:

RIOT POLICE (O.S.)
Le petit roque!

Zeffirelli, Mitch-mitch, and Vittel dart away to a metal cart with a chessboard on it (black pieces only). Zeffirelli sits down on a cane-backed dining room chair. He studies his options for a fraction of a second, then moves a knight against his invisible opponent. Mitch-mitch quickly writes in chalk on a small slate and thrusts it up into the sky on a long, skinny pole.

CUT TO:

The riot-police. A communications signaler at the spearhead sits at his own metal cart operating a remote field-telephone system. He raises a pair of binoculars to his eyes.

INSERT:

The binoculars' P.O.V. The slate peeking over the top of the school-desk barricade reads: "Kt. to Q.B.3".

The signaler relays a message into his handset receiver:

SIGNALER
Knight to queen's bishop three.

CUT TO:

The situation room at the Ennui *Mairie* (long conference table, tall leather chairs, numerous television sets). A cabinet aide listening on the other end of the telephone line nods and scribbles on an official memo-pad. He presents the message to: the mayor (seventy-five, white moustache, rolled up shirtsleeves/unbuttoned waistcoat), seated at his own chessboard (white pieces only), surrounded by a team of political advisors and game-strategy analysts.

CABINET AIDE
Mr. Mayor? He moved.

The mayor studies the message briefly (counsel peering over his shoulders), then flicks it aside and looks at the board, hands on hips. He puts his fingers to his own knight, pauses while his team murmurs support/uncertainty, then makes an assertive move.

CUT TO:

The riot police. The signaler nods and shouts the capture into a microphone, blasting from the loudspeaker:

SIGNALER

Le cavalier prend le cavalier!

CUT TO:

Zeffirelli. He removes his knight from the board, folds his hands, and concentrates. Mitch-mitch and Vittel resume reading the pink pamphlet. Zeffirelli, distracted, asks:

ZEFFIRELLI

What page you on?

Mitch-mitch and Vittel answer simultaneously, eyes glued to pages:

VITTEL

Final chapter.

MITCH-MITCH

Last paragraph.

Zeffirelli waits. (The sun sets. Street lights blink on.) Mitch-mitch and Vittel close their pamphlets and nod slowly with intrigued admiration, deeply thoughtful. Just as they begin to speak: Juliette's voice barks sharply from the top of her ladder:

JULIETTE

You call this a manifesto?

Zeffirelli, Mitch-mitch, and Vittel look up. Juliette descends to the ground, fuming.

VITTEL

Don't you?

MITCH-MITCH

What's wrong with it?

ZEFFIRELLI

(defensive)

I think so. By definition.

Other student protesters begin to gather around. Juliette opens to a marked page and shouts:

JULIETTE

Page two, "Proclamation 7".

Members of the growing audience open their pink pamphlets and quickly turn to the indicated paragraph. Juliette runs her finger along the text, rapid-muttering unintelligibly to herself under her breath until she arrives at the pertinent passage -- which she then declaims with angry, emphatic, bitter contempt. Krementz, in voiceover, drowns her out:

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

In spite of the purity of their cause (to create a free, borderless, utopian civilization), the students, nevertheless,
(more)

ZEFFIRELLI
 (correction)
Polished it. Certain passages.

The assembled group now turns to, previously unseen, just outside the inner circle: Kremenz, taking notes in her composition book. She looks slightly sheepish. Juliette objects:

JULIETTE
 Why is she participating? She should maintain journalistic neutrality.

Mitch-mitch and Vittel respond immediately and simultaneously:

VITTEL	MITCH-MITCH
No such thing. Doesn't exist.	Journalistic neutrality is a discredited concept.

Juliette, disgusted, rips her copy of the manifesto to shreds. Zeffirelli is horrified.

JULIETTE
 We didn't appoint you (or Mrs. Kremenz) spokesman for us. Your job is to play chess.

Zeffirelli points at the scraps on the ground. He explains:

ZEFFIRELLI
 I inscribed it to you.

JULIETTE
 (hesitates)
 Oh.

Juliette crouches down and digs among the bits of paper. She finds one with a handwritten dedication on it. She reads it, then tucks it into her shirt pocket.

JULIETTE
 I'll save this souvenir, but for the rest of it: I couldn't disagree more.

Juliette checks her make-up in her compact mirror. Zeffirelli looks wounded. Mitch-mitch and Vittel pat him on the back. Kremenz, eye-balling Juliette in disapproval, says in voiceover:

KREMENTZ (V.O.)
 Remind myself: you are a guest at this *manifestation*. Not my fight. Stay out of it, Lucinda. Keep your mouth shut.

Nevertheless, Kremenz interrupts herself out loud:

KREMENTZ

I have to say something.

(to Juliette)

You're a very bright girl, Juliette. If you'd put away your powder-puff (for one minute, forgive me) and think for yourself (for one minute, forgive me) you might realize: you're all in this together. Even the riot-police.

Juliette pauses, frozen in her mirror. The crowd of student protesters, eager and intrigued, draws closer, gossiping at a whisper. Juliette snaps her compact shut and says, confrontational but respectful:

JULIETTE

I'm not a child, Mrs. Krementz. I always think for myself.

(including her comrades)

We all do.

Mitch-mitch and Vittel respond simultaneously again:

MITCH-MITCH

I wouldn't say that.

VITTEL

Some do. Some don't.

The signaler's voice booms over the loudspeaker again:

SIGNALER (O.S.)

À vous!

ZEFFIRELLI

(tense)

Our move.

JULIETTE

(to Mrs. Krementz)

You believe I haven't informed myself properly? Or taken important matters seriously? I assure you, it's not the case.

KREMENTZ

(backpedaling)

That was impolite. Of me. I withdraw the remark.

Zeffirelli looks back and forth between Krementz and Juliette. Long pause (more whispered gossip). Juliette shrugs, indifferent:

JULIETTE

If you wish.

KREMENTZ
 (honestly)
 I beg your pardon.

JULIETTE
 (detached)
 Very well.

KREMENTZ
 (sincerely)
 I'm sorry.

JULIETTE
 (coldly)
 Noted.

KREMENTZ
 (hardening)
 Thank you. You're sure?

JULIETTE
 Of course.

Juliette turns away to go -- then (on second thought) returns, suspicious:

JULIETTE
 Sure about what?

KREMENTZ
 (matter-of-fact)
 Sure you're not a child.

JULIETTE
 (stiffening again)
Quite sure.

KREMENTZ
 (bluntly)
 Then learn to accept an apology. That's important.

Juliette's eyes darken. Aside, the pre-law student announces in a hushed voice:

SMART GIRL
 It's a fight! The old American versus the revolutionary, French teenager.

Juliette, derisive, demands:

JULIETTE
 Important to whom?

KREMENTZ
(frankly)
Grown-ups.

The signaler booms over the loudspeaker again once more:

SIGNALER (O.S.)
À vous!

ZEFFIRELLI
(frustrated)
Our move. The mayor's waiting.

Juliette, exceedingly flustered, blurts harshly:

JULIETTE
I don't object to you sleeping with him,
Mrs. Kremenz. We all have that freedom.
(It's a fundamental human right we fight
for, in fact.) What I object to is:
(slightly hysterical)
I think you're in love with Zeffirelli!
That's wrong; or, at the very least, it's
vulgar. You're an old maid.

The entire avenue (miraculously) goes dead silent. Kremenz has the full attention of every protester and bystander in the vicinity. She blushes bright red. In an instant: her eyes fill with fierce tears. She says quietly, dignified:

KREMENTZ
Kindly leave me my dignity.

Zeffirelli explains rapid-fire, firmly, gently to the group:

ZEFFIRELLI
She's not an old maid.
(to Juliette:)
She's not in love with me.
(to the group:)
She's our friend.
(to Juliette of Kremenz:)
I'm her friend.
(to Kremenz of Juliette:)
She's confused.
(to Juliette of Kremenz:)
She wants to help us.
(to Kremenz of Juliette:)
She's angry.
(to the group:)
She's a very good writer.

Zeffirelli turns to Kremenz. Kremenz bows, accepting the compliment. Zeffirelli asks, concerned:

ZEFFIRELLI

It's a lonely life, isn't it?

Krementz stares at Zeffirelli, surprised. She hesitates. She looks to Juliette. Juliette's lips part, but she does not speak. Kremenz says softly:

KREMENTZ

Sometimes.

CUT TO:

The situation room. The cabinet aide, holding the telephone receiver, says to the mayor at his chessboard:

CABINET AIDE

Still no response.

The mayor frowns. He picks up a game clock and looks at the timer. He shrugs.

MAYOR

Rubber bullets and tear gas.

CUT TO:

Krementz in close-up, eyes still filled with tears:

KREMENTZ

It's true. I should maintain journalistic neutrality. If it exists.

CUT TO:

Juliette in close-up, now crying, as well:

JULIETTE

Please, excuse me, Mrs. Kremenz.

Krementz takes Juliette's hand and clutches it briefly. She nods and smiles. Juliette looks upset and uncomfortable. Zeffirelli, beside and between them, is powerless, puzzled, and moved. A volley of tear-gas canisters, flash grenades, and sound bombs flies through the air behind the trio, bursting, blazing, banging, sparking, popping, etc. Protesters scatter away in all directions. Kremenz dismisses the display with a reassuring:

KREMENTZ

It's just fireworks.

Zeffirelli and Juliette, slightly awed, remain in place with Kremenz. The phalanx of riot-police surges over and around the barricade, flooding the street, swinging clubs, firing rubber bullets, deflecting paving stones and flying bottles, etc.

Ignoring the entire commotion, Kremenz points at Juliette and says to Zeffirelli:

KREMENTZ
 She's the best of them.
 (then, to both)
 Stop bickering. Go make love.

Zeffirelli and Juliette grimace, embarrassed. Kremenz points at, nearby, a checker-striped (matching Juliette's helmet) motorcycle leaning on its kickstand. Zeffirelli and Juliette turn to look at each other. Juliette says openly:

JULIETTE
 I'm a virgin.

ZEFFIRELLI
 (hesitates)
 Me, too -- except for Mrs. Kremenz.

Pause. Kremenz says politely, with a shrug:

KREMENTZ
 I thought so.

Automatically, in unison, Zeffirelli and Juliette jump on the motorcycle. He wraps his arms around her waist. She produces the ignition key from her pocket, inserts/twists it, kicks the starter, and guns the engine. One of the student protesters rolls aside a mesh-steel bin filled with gym equipment revealing: a gap in the barricade. Mitch-mitch and Vittel scramble through, followed by a dozen of their shouting comrades -- and Juliette (with her passenger) on the motorcycle. They shoot away, up the avenue.

Kremenz stands alone at the center of the commotion.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)
 March fifteenth.

INSERT:

A desktop, a coffee cup, an ashtray. Kremenz's hands snap open her composition book -- revealing, in the process, a glimpsed, unexpected stray entry (in four colors of ball-point pen) upside-down on the last page. She immediately flips back and rotates the journal to study it.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)
 Discover on flyleaf of my composition
 book: a hasty paragraph.

EXT. WALK-UP APARTMENT. NIGHT

The facade of an old building of modest flats. The camera zooms out from Kremenz reading/smoking, lamp-lit in her bedroom window, to reveal the windows of her neighbors (cooking, ironing, vacuuming, glued to television sets and radios).

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

Not sure when Zeffirelli had the chance to write it. Late that night, while I slept? Poetic (not necessarily in a bad way). Reads as follows:

CUT TO:

The motorcycle racing down a wide, eerily vacant boulevard. Zeffirelli's voice:

ZEFFIRELLI (V.O.)

Postscript to a Burst Appendix: an invincible comet speeds on its guided arc toward the outer reaches of the galaxy in cosmic space-time. What was our cause?

SPLIT-SCREEN:

A pair of slow-motion portraits (eyes directly into camera). On the left, Kremenz, body wrapped in a damp towel, hair pinned and netted, pearls; on the right, Juliette, shirtless in a brassiere, face smeared with cold cream, plastic shower cap. They stare at themselves in the mirror.

ZEFFIRELLI (V.O.)

Recollection of two memories. You: soap-scent of drugstore shampoo, ashtray of stale cigarettes, burnt toast. Her: perfume of cheap gasoline, coffee on the breath (too much sugar), cocoa-butter skin. (Where does she spend her summers?) They say it's the smells you finally don't forget. The brain works that way.

CUT TO:

The motorcycle, another angle. Zeffirelli, clutching Juliette, closes his eyes. Smoke and embers swirl from his skinny cigar.

ZEFFIRELLI (V.O.)

(I've never read my mother's books. I'm told my father was really quite remarkable during the last war. Best parents I know.)

INT. STUDENT RESIDENCE. NIGHT

A six-bed sleeping quarters with the lights out. Zeffirelli and Juliette sit cross-legged, naked, facing each other on the sheets of a top bunk just below the ceiling. They talk rapidly at a whisper, giggling, touching, sharing junk food and a Coke. In the open bathroom door, a student in a dressing gown brushes out her hair. Slowly: the interior background dissolves away revealing stars, planets, the universe, infinity, etc. A tiny comet inches across the sky-scape.

ZEFFIRELLI (V.O.)

The girls dormitory: first time I've come inside (except to vandalize it during demonstrations). I said, "Don't criticize my manifesto." She said, "Take off your clothes." I feel shy about my new muscles. Her large, stupid eyes watched me pee. A thousand kisses later: will she still remember the taste of my tool on the tip of her tongue? (Apologies, Mrs. Kremenz: I know you despise crude language.)

INSERT:

Extreme close-up: the end of Zeffirelli's stray entry. Too scribbly to read. Kremenz's voice returns:

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

Additional sentence at bottom of page completely indecipherable due to poor penmanship.

INT. UNIVERSITY ROOFTOP. NIGHT

The tiny transmission booth next to the broadcasting tower above the *quai*. Juliette, Vittel, Mitch-mitch, and the two other headphoned student disc-jockeys sit clustered around Zeffirelli (with an open, heavily-corrected-in-red-ink copy of the pink pamphlet in his hands) at the microphone. The familiar French pop song plays in the background as Zeffirelli announces to the radio audience:

ZEFFIRELLI

"Revisions to a Manifesto." Page four,
"Asterisk 1".

CUT TO:

An exterior view as Zeffirelli continues the broadcast (inaudible through the sound-proof glass). Up above: an electrical crackle and a bang/pop from the top of the broadcast tower. A dust of falling sparks.

INSERT:

The "On Air" light flickers to "Off."

MONTAGE:

The listening audience at various radios: students at a barricade, riot-police at an armored troop-transport, the professor with his wife in curlers, Zeffirelli's sisters under a sheet in their bedroom, Paul alone in his kitchen. They adjust their dials, twist their antennae, poke, tap, shake, etc.

(Note: the audio track during the following sequence of shots consists entirely of static interference, sizzling zaps, oscillating warbles, and white noise. No live sound.)

CUT TO:

A high, direct-overhead, bird's-eye view of the transmission booth. A hatch on the side cracks open, and Zeffirelli's head pokes out and looks up at camera.

INSERT:

The top of the broadcasting tower. A science-project-type dry-cell ignition battery (brand: *Éclair Blanche*) has been affixed with duct tape and bailing wire to the side of the truss below a whip antenna at the pinnacle of the structure. A pronged wire, loosed from its terminal-post, dances, jolts, and flashes with electrical arcs.

Zeffirelli reaches back inside and produces a pair of needle-nose pliers. He says (silent):

ZEFFIRELLI

Wait here.

Zeffirelli briskly, immediately, scales the tower, up out of frame. Juliette, Mitch-mitch, and Vittel, alarmed, burst out of the booth and shout urgently (silent) at Zeffirelli:

VITTEL

Stop! What are you doing?

MITCH-MITCH

Are you crazy? Don't be stupid!

JULIETTE

Come back down here right now,
Zeffirelli!

Zeffirelli, cheerily ignoring his friends' warnings, reaches the top of the flimsy broadcast tower. The structure bends and sways slightly as he quickly pinches the prong of the live wire with the pliers and re-inserts it into its terminal-post.

(Note: static ends, replaced by "Tip-top" with high-tenor vocals, expansive, orchestral backing, etc. Still no live sound.)

Juliette, Mitch-mitch, and Vittel stare up at Zeffirelli, tense with concern, involuntarily mouthing the words to the pop song. Zeffirelli waves down at them and gives a salute, reassuring, then looks out across the twinkling cityscape. He withdraws a fresh, skinny cigar from his breast pocket, holds it with the pliers, touches it to the gently sparking battery terminal, and puffs. He tucks the pliers under his belt. He smokes and smiles.

The battery explodes. A support cable snaps. Zeffirelli hangs on as the tower collapses.

INT. TAXI CAB. NIGHT

A Citroën sedan. Driver: woman, late middle-age, tired. The husband and wife (Zeffirelli's parents) sit together on one side of the back seat, arms intertwined, clasping hands, stone-faced. They wear pajamas/nightgown with belted overcoats. Kremenz explains:

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

He is not an invincible comet speeding on its guided arc toward the outer reaches of the galaxy in cosmic space-time. Rather: he is a boy who will die young. He will drown on this planet, in the steady current of the deep, dirty, magnificent river that flows night and day through the veins and arteries of his own ancient city. His parents will receive a telephone call at midnight, dress briskly, mechanically, and hold hands in the silent taxi as they go to identify the body of their cold son.

The taxi stops. (A neon red cross glows outside the window.) The husband, startled, counts out coins from his pajama-top pocket. He and his wife exit. The *chauffeuse* drives on, passengerless.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

His likeness (mass-produced and shrink-wrap packaged) will be sold like bubblegum to the hero-inspired -- who hope to see themselves like this:

MONTAGE:

A rapid-sequence of inserts. First: the original negative of a reportage photograph depicting Zeffirelli at chessboard, skinny cigar clenched in smiling teeth, dazzling/mischievous eyes flashing up to camera, caught mid-move as he slides his black

queen seven spaces, blurred by motion, to capture his rival's white one. Filling the frame all around him: a platoon of armed and armored standing riot-police. They react, gasping, groaning, grimacing, wincing, etc.

Next: the same image (now a positive print) boxed in grease-pencil on a contact sheet surrounded by the sequence of exposures taken during the moments before/after.

Next: the front page of a newspaper with the same image (in dotted halftone) and the caption below it: "Boy, skilled chess player/activist in youth movement, dies."

Next: a snapshot of a gang of posing teenagers. One, front-and-center, wears a T-shirt silk-screened with the same image.

Finally: a magazine advertisement using the same image (airbrushed and colorized) to sell skinny cigars (branded: "Toscano Zeffirelli").

EXT. RIVER EMBANKMENT. DAY

A crane on a barge alongside a footbridge clanks and ratchets as it hoists the demolished broadcasting antenna out of the dark water. An assembly of onlookers watches from the bank below a street-sign: *Quai Blasé*.

INSERT:

A chessboard. It leans upright against the footbridge railing, encircled with candles, flowers, paving-stones, scribbled messages, a "Tip-top" record, and the above-mentioned clipping (same image of Zeffirelli) held in place by a black queen as a paperweight. Newsprint rustles slightly in the breeze.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

The touching narcissism of the young.

The camera dollies away from the impromptu shrine to reveal Juliette (in Zeffirelli's transparent rain-slicker), Vittel (arm in a sling), and Mitch-mitch (in National Duty-obligation uniform, duffel over his shoulder) watching the river, backs to camera, as the grey surface is peppered by a drizzling, afternoon rain.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

March thirtieth.

INT. WALK-UP APARTMENT. DAY

Krementz's bedroom. On the television set: riot-police dismantle abandoned barricades; firemen douse smoldering vehicles; a milkman carries fresh bottles in two metal baskets. (A super-title blinks: "Strikers Yield!")

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

Across the street, a glaring metaphor:

Krementz (in her rose *peignoir*) sits up in bed, portable typewriter on her knees, staring out the window. She wears the gas-mask. Faint sound of shouting children in playground below.

KREMENTZ (V.O.)

Bell rings; pupils scamper inside (back to their obedient classrooms); a creaky swing sways in the deserted schoolyard.

INT. WRITER'S OFFICE (KREMENTZ). DAY

Krementz sits alone at her desk eating burnt toast. A knock, then the door creaks open, and Howitzer looks inside. Krementz points at a manuscript on her desk. Howitzer enters and sits. He reads, she eats.

Story #3
(pages 98 to 128)

INSERT:

The proof-print of a diner's chronicle in the Tastes and Smells Section. A line-drawing depicts a dinner plate with a pen on one side, a pencil and eraser on the other, and a ruled/margined writing-paper placemat underneath.

TITLE:

Kitchen Accounts
 "The Private Dining Room
 of the Police Commissioner"
 by Roebuck Wright

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO. DAY

The set of a talk show with three swivel-armchairs and an ashtray on a pedestal. The host (white): forty, beige/check three-piece, longish hair parted on the side. The guest (black): fifty, open collar/silk scarf, burnt-orange safari suit. He is Roebuck Wright. He speaks in the drawl (languid, literary) of the Gothic American South. Both men smoke.

T.V. HOST

Someone told me you have a photographic memory. Is that true?

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

That is false. I have a typographic memory. I recollect the written word with considerable accuracy and detail -- but in other spheres my powers of retention are distinctly impressionistic. I am known to my intimates as a most forgetful man.

T.V. HOST

Yet you remember every word you ever wrote: the novels, the essays, the poems, the plays --

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

(bittersweet)
 -- the unrequited valentines. Sadly, I do.

T.V. HOST

May I test you?

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

(coy/demure)
 If you must.
 (looking to audience)
 Unless we try the patience of your
 (more)

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (cont'd)

viewership --

(looking to wings)

-- or the esteemed spokesmen of Gemini
Toothpowder?

Off-stage: an actor stands at a sponsor display-table stacked with tins of whitening dentifrice. He looks slightly startled, then smiles awkwardly and nods. The host continues:

T.V. HOST

My favorite piece is the one about the
cook where the kidnappers get poisoned.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

(immediately self-quoting)

"Do students of the table dream in
flavors?" This was the first of the
questions a reporter for this magazine
had diligently prepared in advance of his
encounter with Lieutenant Nescaffier,
ranking chef at District Headquarters on
the narrow river-peninsula known as the
Rognure d'Ongle. All such queries were to
remain unanswered in the course of that
eventful evening.

(brief pause)

Shall I carry on?

T.V. HOST

(impressed)

Please.

INT. GROUND-FLOOR HALLWAY. EVENING

A long, institutional-style corridor in a massive, seventeenth century building. Dim overhead light. Worn, grey linoleum floors. Dingy, chipped, cracked, yellowing, thick-gloss painted walls. Camera leads Roebuck Wright (fifteen years younger, dressed in a black suit and necktie) down the hall, shoes clip-clopping, eyeballs searching left and right, lost.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

I had arrived insufficiently early.
Though the suite of rooms on the
penultimate floor of the grand edifice
was hypothetically indicated on a
floorplan provided on the back of the
carte de dégustation --

INSERT:

Overhead angle: a slip of a paper pinched tightly in Roebuck Wright's fingers. It is a menu for a nine course dinner with a map (on the verso) of the labyrinthine compound.

CUT TO:

Roebuck Wright, same corridor. Camera now follows him.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
 -- it was nigh impossible to locate. At least, for this reporter. (A weakness in cartography: the curse of the homosexual.)

Roebuck Wright makes a wrong turn, doubles-back, then U-turns, repeatedly checking room numbers against his map.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
 M. Nescaffier made his name and reputation (he is fanatically celebrated among cooks, cops, and *capitains* -- not to mention squealers, stoolies, and snitches) as the great exemplar of the mode of cuisine known as *Gastronomie Gendarmique*.

MONTAGE:

Roebuck Wright pokes his head into the doorways of various departmental offices. First: the crimes-in-progress dispatch center (bank of phones, radio operator, wall map of the city pocked with urgent alarms and alerts).

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
 "Police cooking" began with the stake-out picnic and paddy-wagon snack, but has evolved and codified into something refined, intensely nourishing, and, if executed properly, marvelously flavorful.

Next: a training gymnasium with cadets in police-issue exercise leotards performing fitness regimes (pugilist sparring, rope climbing, medicine ball throwing).

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
 Fundamentals: highly portable, rich in protein, eaten with the non-dominant hand only (the other being reserved for firearms and paperwork).

Next: the target-end (bullets whizzing) of a marksmanship practice range.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

Most dishes are served pre-cut. Nothing crunchy. Quiet food.

Next: the disguises check-out dispensary (wigs, fake beards, ecclesiastical vestments).

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

Sauces are dehydrated and ground to a powder to avoid spillage and the risk of the tainting of a crime scene.

Finally: an apparently unattended booking room. Roebuck Wright pauses, momentarily mesmerized. He wanders slowly inside. He stands at the door of a locked holding cell (hand-labeled "Chicken Coop #1").

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

Diners are expected to provide their own *fourchettes de poche*, often engraved with the arcane mottoes and off-color sayings of their respective precincts.

A previously-unseen small, wiry, bespectacled number-cruncher sleeping on a bunk inside the cell rustles slightly. Roebuck Wright retreats a step, startled. The number-cruncher looks up with frightened eyes. He says softly:

NUMBER-CRUNCHER

How are you planning to kill me?

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

(hesitates)

I believe this to be a case of mistaken identity.

The number-cruncher looks skeptical. Roebuck Wright asks gently, indicating the sign:

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

Have you been in the chicken coop for a very long while?

Off-screen: a theatrical cough/throat-clearing. Roebuck Wright only now notices a previously-unseen platoon of guards (smoking, snacking, reading, toothpicking, all armed with cylindrical-magazine submachine guns) watching him evenly from around the room. Roebuck Wright hesitates, apologetic.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

I beg your pardon.

The number-cruncher watches, puzzled, as Roebuck Wright ducks away. The camera booms down to the wooden baseboard below the number-cruncher's bunk:

INSERT:

A spaghetti of carved graffiti. One message, only faintly visible, seems to read: "Roebuck Wright was here."

CUT TO:

A narrow hallway on a high floor. A minuscule elevator on the far end opens. Roebuck Wright emerges and approaches.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

M. Nescaffier, even during his apprenticeship in a provincial fire department, aspired to a lofty perch, and there can be no higher position in the *métier* than that of *Chef Cuisinier* for the private dining room of the *Commissaire de la Police Municipale*.

The camera pans to a pair of double-doors discreetly labeled: "Privé".

INT. DINING ROOM. NIGHT

The door creaks open and Roebuck Wright peers into:

A rustic, dark-wood chamber. Wide-plank floors. Low ceilings supported by thick beams. Heavy, ornate, carved chairs and sideboard. Lace curtains. Rugs in crimson. A carefully-set table which seats: a sturdy but elegant eighty-year-old woman and two fifty-five-year-old men. One is old for his age, bent, wrinkled, ashen, and ghoulish. The other is young for his age, short statured/broad shouldered, dressed in a well-tailored dark suit with a shot of red thread sewn into the lapel. He is the *Commissaire*. Across the room, next to a young policeman with an apron over his uniform, a chef (French-Korean, tortoise-shell spectacles, haircut with sharp bangs, fifty) stands lingering in the kitchen doorway.

The entire group stares at camera/Roebuck Wright.

The *Commissaire* checks a clock on the mantelpiece (time: two minutes after nine). He motions to a single, empty chair at the table. Roebuck Wright, sheepish, approaches, sits, and says gently:

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

Forgive my tardiness.

COMMISSAIRE

(suddenly warm)

Not at all. Mr. Wright, may I present my mother, Louise de la Villatte. You can call her *Maman*. We all do.

Roebuck Wright bows to the old woman. Her smile exudes a powerful maternal geniality. The *Commissaire* indicates the other seated man:

COMMISSAIRE

This is my oldest friend, *Chou-fleur*. When I met him, he was a girlish little schoolboy with ringlets and a full set of teeth. Now he looks like a corpse.

As the *Commissaire's* childhood friend chuckles to himself, his dentures loudly click. Roebuck Wright bows again. The *Commissaire* points across the room.

COMMISSAIRE

In the corner, Patrolman Maupassant. He'll be serving.
(aside)
Cocktails.

The patrolman/waiter briskly fetches up a tray of small aluminum thermoses. He delivers them to the table just as a boy (French-North African, age ten) in a blue lab coat enters through a side door. He carries a carton filled with files and documents. He is Gigi. A police academy cadet/nanny trails behind him. The *Commissaire*, vaguely suspicious, explains as they pass:

COMMISSAIRE

This is my son, Gigi, in the crime-lab smock. What are you stealing? From my personal records.

GIGI

Unsolved cases.

COMMISSAIRE

Say hello to Mr. Wright.

GIGI

Hello, Mr. Wright.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

Hello, Gigi.

Gigi pauses to shake hands while balancing boxes. Roebuck Wright explains in voiceover:

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
Full name: Isadore Sharif de la Villatte.

FLASHBACK:

The *Commissaire* and a younger Gigi walk together down a dock alongside the hull of an ocean liner. Stevedores hoist crates. A mist drifts across the planks.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
The *Commissaire* and his only son,
motherless and widowed, left the colony
where the boy was born cemented together
by their shared grief. Gigi was six.

The younger Gigi rides with his head sticking out the window of a speeding police car. Sirens blast. The *Commissaire* is at the wheel.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
His schoolrooms were the station house
and the squad car.

The younger Gigi carefully presses the enormous, ink-coated fingers of a hulking thug onto a blank arrest-form page. The *Commissaire* (observing) looks pleased.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
He was educated by forensic tutors in the
traditions of law enforcement.

A meek shopkeeper gives a description as the younger Gigi finishes a sketch then flips it around to show: a wild-eyed, crooked-toothed maniac. The shopkeeper nods. The *Commissaire* (observing) looks pleased again.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
His first drawings were facial composites
based on eyewitness testimony.

Split-screen: on the left, the younger Gigi taps a signal on a telegraph machine; on the right, the *Commissaire* listens and records.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
His first words were in Morse Code.

(Note: electronic beeps accompany a title sliding across the bottom of the screen which reads: "*--* *- *--* *- P A P A".)

The younger Gigi and the *Commissaire* stand in front of the crimes-in-progress wall map, studying alarms and alerts.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
It was, I suppose, wonderfully obvious.

Gigi and the *Commissaire* hold hands.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
He was brought up to succeed the
Commissaire, himself.

CUT TO:

Gigi lingering next to Roebuck Wright. He says, pointed:

GIGI
I've read you. In the magazine.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT
(hesitates)
To your satisfaction?

GIGI
(broadly)
Of course.

Gigi and his minder exit through a secret door into a cramped spiral stairwell. The chef now stands at the elbow of the *Commissaire*.

COMMISSAIRE
I trust you're already familiar with this
genius, at least by reputation:
(with pride, even vanity)
Lieutenant Nescaffier.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT
(reverently)
I surely am.

The party of four all look up to the chef. The chef salutes and stands at ease, calm and confident. The *Commissaire* nods "begin". The chef disappears. The diners unscrew their thermoses and decant doses of a cloudy, lilac-colored liquid. They sip their cocktails. Roebuck Wright, already enchanted, explains in voiceover:

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
The drink, a milky, purplish *aperitif*,
ferociously fragrant, overtly medicinal,
ever-so-faintly anesthetizing (and cooled
to a glacial viscosity in a miniature
version of the type of vacuum-flask
normally associated with campsites and
schoolrooms) cast a spell -- which,
during the subsequent sixty second
(more)

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.) (cont'd)
interval, was to be mortally broken. On
three overlapping dramatic-timelines, the
following events came to pass:

INSERT:

A black-gloved hand activates a stopwatch.

(Note: each segment of the following sequence portrays a different scene occurring during the same approximately simultaneous one-minute timespan, initiated by the same sound: the stopwatch start. Loud ticking, amplified and reverberant, continues throughout.)

MONTAGE:

1. In the kitchen: the chef blazes up an armory of cooktop-fires and furnace-flames, then sets to work: chopping, stirring, poaching, braising, flipping, folding, salting, spicing, etc.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

One. M. Nescaffier began his mysterious ritual. (I can neither comprehend nor describe what occurs behind a kitchen door. I have always been content to enjoy the issue of an artist's talent without unveiling the secrets of the chisel or the turpentine.)

2. In the nursery (a garret playroom decorated with books and paints, trunks overflowing with costumes, a police rocking-horse, etc.): Gigi and the cadet/nanny sit on tiny chairs at a diminutive table as they examine the stacks of borrowed paperwork.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

Two. The skylight window of the makeshift nursery which occupies the attic quarters jimmied ajar.

The camera tilts up to the vaulted glass ceiling. A pane inches sideways in its frame with a nearly silent squeak. A black-gloved hand gripping a medium-calibre automatic pistol (muzzle-mounted with a silencer) cranes into the room. The extended barrel slants toward the floor.

The camera tilts back down. The cadet/nanny stands up and exits frame. He returns with an ashtray and lights a cigarette. He puffs on it -- then, suddenly: he and Gigi both look to the ceiling/skylight.

The camera tilts back up with a whip. The gun fires (a silencer "thwoop"). Off-camera: a thump, a thud, and a thwack.

The camera tilts back down. The cadet/nanny is now dead in his tiny chair, shot through the top of the head, still bleeding liberally onto the strewn depositions etc. Gigi is gone.

A rope drops into frame from above. The chauffeur (a bent-nosed former heavyweight prize-fighter with a cauliflower ear and stitches on his forehead) who slides down and drops to the floor wears a grey cap; long, grey, double-breasted, black-belted coat; grey breeches; ballet slippers; and a white handkerchief tied over his face like a bandit. A coiled cord hangs over his shoulder. He darts/pads out of the shot. Off-camera: a scrambling hubbub.

The chauffeur re-enters carrying Gigi, trussed like a chicken, blindfolded, and gagged. He grips him at the waist. He takes a deep breath, bends his knees, then hurls the boy like a spinning circus tumbler straight up, through the ceiling skylight, out of the building. The chauffeur then takes the end of the rope and clips it to a metal ring strapped to his chest. He waits.

3. In the dining room: a small, red indicator-lightbulb mounted on the sideboard blinks on. The patrolman/waiter frowns slightly. He opens a cupboard door, withdraws a telephone, brings it to the dinner table, and plugs it into a socket flush-mounted on the burnished oak.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

Three. Patrolman Maupassant, responding to an infrequently illuminated signal, delivered a telephone to his superior.

The *Commissaire* picks up the receiver and signals for his mother to pick up the extension.

COMMISSAIRE

Go ahead.

The *Commissaire* and his mother listen, stone-faced. She takes notes. Roebuck Wright exchanges an anxious look with *Chou-fleur*.

INSERT:

Maman's transcription (subtitled in English):

As you know by now, we have kidnapped your son and absconded to a secure location which you will never discover. Release (or execute) the *Abacus*, and the little boy will be safely returned to your custody. Failure to do so by sun-up will result in your son's violent death.

The *Commissaire* hangs up, puzzled. He jolts to his feet and darts out of the room.

CUT TO:

A hand-drawn cel-animation shot vividly illustrating the rooftop of the *préfecture* headquarters in the bright moonlight. A stocky kidnapper is positioned next to the open skylight window. A thin kidnapper stands inside a large, black wicker basket.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

The getaway (and eventual motor pursuit) was rendered vividly (if, perhaps, a bit fancifully) in a comic strip published the following week.

The somersaulting boy (Gigi) flies up through the skylight. The stocky kidnapper catches him in his arms, quickly dumps him into the basket, and climbs in after. The thin kidnapper pulls a valve-chain, igniting a propane torch. The basket (now revealed in a slow zoom-out to be attached to a pitch black, stealth hot air balloon) rises -- carrying below it: the chauffeur, swaying gently as the balloon travels up and completely disappears into the night.

EXT. NARROW AVENUE. DAY

Early morning. A light snow falls on the doorstep of a low rent, residential hotel.

TITLE:

Three Days Earlier

The door opens, and the number-cruncher pokes out and looks up and down the sidewalk, nervous. He emerges in hat and overcoat carrying a yellow suitcase clutched to his chest. He walks briskly across the deserted street, through a narrow passageway, down an alley to: a parked, late forties (running boards, wire wheels) Citroën sedan. He gets in, tucks the suitcase beside him, and puts the key into the ignition. The motor whinnies, coughs, and sputters -- but fails to start. In the back seat, a policeman rises into view, pistol fixed on the back of the number-cruncher's head. The number-cruncher looks in the rearview mirror, then slowly raises his hands into the air. All around the vehicle: a dozen additional officers appear from behind and beneath various hiding places (trash can, window ledge, rain barrel, horse cart, coal chute). A paddy-wagon reverses into frame with a screech. The number-cruncher is whisked out of the Citroën, handcuffed, and swept up into the prisoner transport. A pair of iron doors slams shut.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

Though the infamous Ennui gang war "Winter Crimewave" had eradicated a healthy number of thugs and hooligans, it had also claimed the lives of a disgraceful proportion of innocent citizens. Due to the surprise capture of the racketeering accountant Albert the *Abacus* (in possession of a valise containing payroll stubs for all three of the city's major syndicates), the law-abiding community's hopes for an accelerated resolution to the crisis had been renewed. However: this turn of events had forcefully rattled the cages of the denizens of the criminal underworld.

Suddenly, a barrage of machine gun fire perforates the paddy-wagon, the Citroën, the rain barrel, the horse cart, the coal chute, most of the windows of the surrounding buildings, and the bodies of a number of the assembled policemen. The surviving officers return fire.

CUT TO:

The talk show. Roebuck Wright says, aside, to his host:

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

For myself, I had failed to recognize the *Abacus*; but, as it happened: I knew the chicken coop. (This is not in the article, by the way.) If I refer to Mr. Howitzer, do you know who I mean?

T.V. HOST

Of course.

(to the audience)

Arthur Howitzer, Jr. Founder and editor of "The French Dispatch".

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

It was my first week in Ennui when I suffered the misfortune of being arrested in a drinking establishment on the fringes of the Flop Quarter (along with a number of newly-found companions).

T.V. HOST

What was the charge?

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

(simply)

Love. You see, people may or may not be
(more)

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (cont'd)

mildly threatened by your anger, your hatred, your pride -- but love the wrong way: and you will find yourself in great jeopardy. In this case, a chicken coop jail cell for six days straight. I had no one who cared to rescue me, no one who cared to scold me, and the only local number committed to my typographic memory was:

INSERT:

A brief memo on "French Dispatch" letterhead. It reads (echoed by Howitzer himself in voiceover):

Dear Mr. Wright, While I regret we are unable to publish either of these specific pieces, I would be very pleased to consider other submissions in the future -- or, if you find yourself in Ennui: telephone me. You seem to know how to write.
Signed, A.H. Jr.

Handwritten below the initials: the publisher's telephone number.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
Printer's District 9-2211.

CUT TO:

The jail cell. Roebuck Wright (aged thirty) is now on the inside: disheveled, unshaven, gaunt.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
I'd never met the man. I knew how to reach him only because I wanted a job.

A telephone slides through a meal-slot with a shlunk. Roebuck Wright picks up the receiver and dials.

CUT TO:

A clock.

TITLE:

Thirty Minutes Later

The camera tilts down to reveal (on the other side of the iron bars): Howitzer himself, seated on a folding chair, sipping a cup of coffee. Roebuck Wright, inside his cell, fills out a form, shakily, in pencil, on a clipboard. He finishes a last sentence and slides the clipboard out the meal-slot. Howitzer picks it up and studies the form.

HOWITZER

Let's see here.

(muttering quickly)

High school newspaper, poetry club, drama society...

(clearly)

Wrote the school song. Words and music.

(muttering quickly)

Junior researcher, cub reporter, assistant editor...

(clearly)

Fires and murders. That's how I started.

My father owned the paper, of course.

(muttering quickly)

Bit of sports, bit of crime, bit of politics...

(clearly)

Shortlisted twice. For "Best Essays".

(muttering)

Deep South, Mid-west, East Coast...

(clearly)

Vast country. Haven't been there for twenty years.

A police guard appears with some paperwork to deliver to Howitzer. He attempts to discreetly interrupt:

POLICE GUARD

Mr. Howitzer --

Howitzer responds sharply, holding up a finger:

HOWITZER

Not now. I'm conducting a job interview.

The guard freezes, then evaporates. Howitzer presses on, shuffling pages:

HOWITZER

Your writing samples are good. I re-read them in the taxi. Ever done any book reviews?

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

(hesitates)

Never.

HOWITZER

You're going to be here another few hours before they process you out. Read this --

Howitzer holds up a thin, hardback novel titled "Look Out Below!". The dust-jacket illustration depicts a carbonated, multicolored highball cocktail (bubbles, swizzle stick, lipstick

on the rim). A stamp on the cover reads: "Advance Copy". Howitzer puts the book through the meal-slot.

HOWITZER

-- and give me 300 words. I'll pay you 500 francs, minus the 250 I advanced for your bail (but I'll re-advance half of that back to you for cost-of-living). Bring me a first draft tomorrow morning, and however you go about it, Mr. Wright: try to make it sound like you wrote it that way on purpose.

CUT TO:

Close-up, Roebuck Wright. There are tears in his eyes.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

Thank you.

CUT TO:

Close-up, Howitzer. He says softly:

HOWITZER

No crying.

CUT TO:

The talk show. Roebuck Wright says, matter of fact:

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

He was to be my employer (and friend) for the next thirty years.

(resumes self-quoting)

It came to be known as the Night of a Thousand Slugs. (I'm reciting again.)

MONTAGE:

A succession of interrogations: a bare-knuckle beating in a warehouse; a head plunged into a tub of ice; a face propelled down the length of a bar, smashing through glasses, bottles, and shakers; an upside-down thug swinging by his ankles from a meat hook; a hulking goon with one eyelid swollen shut drowsily watching a swinging pocket-watch; two policemen and a suspect standing on a tarmac as an inert man is hurled from a low-flying police airplane. The body bounces and tumbles to a bone-crunched halt.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

How the *Commissaire* and his elite team of experts and analysts succeeded so swiftly in determining the location of the

(more)

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.) (cont'd)
 kidnapers' lair -- well, I just don't
 know. The tools of the trade, I suppose.

The suspect, in handcuffs, looks horrified. The two policemen are stoic. One, notebook in hand, pencil poised, says:

POLICEMAN
 I'll repeat the question.

EXT. TENEMENT *HÔTEL*. NIGHT

A glowing window at the top-floor of a decrepit apartment building.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
 But succeed they did.

Six stories down the semi-crumbling facade, in the entry passageway, a scrawny cat licks an empty saucer. The small, cobblestone square in front, gas lamplit, is surrounded on all sides by rickety buildings of cheap flats. Uneven, narrow, stone staircases ascend from the street corners up to the higher, encircling *rues* and *passages*. A footbridge edges one side of the *place*, a train truss edges another. Cramped shops (closed) line the sidewalks. Métro station: Hovel District.

Tucked and hidden around the corner: a dense cordon of officers, squad cars, and paddy-wagons. A gathering crowd of locals (the butcher, the fishmonger, the tobacconist, assorted neighborhood characters) quietly nudge and jostle behind a police barrier. Faintly heard, echoing across the *quartier*: a music hall. Otherwise: silence.

A locksmith's shop serves as an improvised command center. Ancient floor-plans and elevation-views, foxed and yellowed, cover a long work-counter. A police-band radio hums and buzzes while a voice broadcasts strategic instructions at a whisper. The *Commissaire*, flanked by *Maman*, *Chou-fleur*, and Roebuck Wright, peers out from the corner of a storefront window through a pair of binoculars.

The camera pans/tilts up back to the glowing window at the top of the decrepit building.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
 Who were they? It was later revealed:

INT. TRIPLE APARTMENT. NIGHT

An expansive flat of small rooms, nooks/alcoves, and numerous corridors which connect the top floors of various adjacent buildings.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

A hired crew of bandits and gunmen imported by the ranking bosses of the Ennui rackets and their network of underworld middlemen.

In the sitting room: the chauffeur tunes and strums a guitar. In the dining room: a stout man (cowboy hat, suit/necktie, dark sunglasses) deals cards to a formidable, elderly woman. In the kitchen: a scrawny thief tinkers with a dismantled radio. In the corridor: a trio of hooligans of various dimensions stare into space. In the bathroom: a quartet of showgirls bathe, paint their toenails, and inject morphine. In front of a pad-locked bedroom door: a pair of shoes (oxblood, lace up, the size of Gigi's feet).

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

Plus: one small, resourceful prisoner determined to free himself and reduce taxpayer expense.

INSERT:

Gigi's bound hands in dim near-blackness. His fingers clink a beat on a tarnished conduit with a half-*centime* coin.

INT/EXT. LAUNDRY CLOSET. NIGHT

Split-screen. On the right, Gigi in a chair, tied up in a dark cupboard. On the left, one of the junkie showgirls, wrapped in a towel, frowning and listening, as she inclines toward the padlocked door. She chews gum.

SHOWGIRL

What's that noise?

Gigi stops clinking. A beat.

GIGI

Air bubbles in the radiator pipes. It's pressurized.

SHOWGIRL

Sounds like Morse Code.

GIGI

(vaguely)

Vaguely. I'm Gigi, by the way. What's your name?

SHOWGIRL

I'm not going to tell you that. This is a felony.

GIGI
 (defiant)
 You're not a criminal. You're just a
 mixed-up showgirl.

SHOWGIRL
 Ha.

GIGI
 Ha, yourself.

Pause. Gigi switches gears:

GIGI
 Are you hungry? I can hear your stomach
 growling.

Pause. Gigi tries once more:

GIGI
 Sing me a lullaby. I'm scared.

SHOWGIRL
 No.

Another pause. The showgirl sings a lullaby. She sighs.

SHOWGIRL
 Are you asleep?

GIGI
 (quietly)
 Yes.

INSERT:

The *Commissaire's* hand. He fingers a miniature cameo locket
 which displays a photograph of the younger Gigi.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
 The *Commissaire* adored Gigi with all his
 voluminous heart.

The *Commissaire* paces up and down the room, fretting and
 contemplating.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
 However: his mind (that exceptional
 machine for the detection and
 investigation of criminal activity) had
 been whirring since dinnertime, and he
 was in a condition of dire calorific
 depletion.

The *Commissaire* stops and murmurs, finally giving in:

COMMISSAIRE

Maman? I'm hungry.

Maman (who has clearly been waiting for this moment) immediately signals to an off-screen attendant and produces a collapsible pocket-fork, which she unfolds. The *Commissaire* and *Chou-fleur* follow suit. The patrolman/waiter swiftly covers a workbench below the front window end-to-end with a checkered tablecloth.

The camera dollies away, into the back room (normally a die-casting and lathing workshop), which has been converted into a temporary kitchen. A sheet of pastries warms over a bank of emergency candles. A tray of shucked oysters cools over a bed of dry ice. Small pots boil along radiator pipes. Meat and fowl in states of mid-preparation hang from the ceiling in nets and baskets. Portable ovens and bunsen burners glow and flicker at lowest flame. Nescaffier whisks a froth in a bowl at a perfectly continuous, robotic rate.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

Nescaffier, back in the field for the first time in six years, came prepared to dazzle.

The patrolman/waiter pokes his head into the room and nods.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

The change was instantaneous.

EXT. LOCKSMITH SHOP. NIGHT

The congregation of police and bystanders outside wait in respectful silence while, seated in the window, behind a pulled blind, in silhouette: the *Commissaire*, *Maman*, *Chou-fleur*, and Roebuck Wright all watch Nescaffier's shadow enter carrying a serving tray. The *Commissaire* rises to his feet and wafts the scent into his nose.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

Even as the faintest hints of the aromas of the great chef's kitchen ribboned into the *Commissaire's* nostrils, he began to envision and formulate a multi-pronged battle-plan.

MONTAGE:

Split-screen: on the right, the *Commissaire*, seated at the workbench table in the locksmith shop, speaks excitedly to *Chou-fleur* while eating continuously with his left hand only; on the left, a small, speckled, boiled egg split open to reveal layers of whipped yolk *mousse*.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
To start: deviled eggs of the
precinct canary served in
shells of its own meringue.

COMMISSAIRE
Send a commando unit to secure
all access points to the south
and west.

On the right, the *Commissaire*, seated at the workbench table in
the locksmith shop, speaks excitedly to *Maman* while eating
continuously with his left hand only; on the left: a saucer of
gibiers and *fruits des bois*.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
Next: kidneys poached with
plums from the mayor's rooftop
arbor.

COMMISSAIRE
Send a guerrilla detachment to
block all egress routes to the
east and north.

On the right, the *Commissaire* illustrates (using arrows and X's)
his scheme/strategy on one of the building floor plan maps; on
the left, small *boulettes* shaped and packaged like a bowl of
candies.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
Then: minced lamb *bon-bons* in
pastry wrappers.

COMMISSAIRE (V.O.)
Drill tunnels (circumference:
75mm) through the partition
walls of all three adjacent
buildings.

On the right, teenage boys and girls in shooting costumes perch
among high chimney tops; on the left, another thermos.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
Blasé oyster soup.

COMMISSAIRE (V.O.)
On the rooftops: amateur
snipers from the local hunting
club.

On the right, a quartet of gear-laden climbers in lederhosen
scramble in formation up a dark alley; on the left: a roasted
bird, boneless, bloody, chopped with potatoes, and served in a
paper cup.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
A magnificent city-park pigeon
hash.

COMMISSAIRE (V.O.)
Down the elevator shaft:
amateur climbers from the
district Alpinist society.

On the right, a light clicks on as an enormous wrestler (in a
striped singlet) is awakened from slumber by a ringing
telephone; on the left, a nicotine *pot de crème* with a white
blob on top.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
Finally: *tabac* pudding with
quadruple cream.

COMMISSAIRE (V.O.)
Wake up the *Jeroboam*, too. I
want him limber, just in case.

CUT TO:

The talk show (once again). The host gently cuts in:

T.V. HOST

May I interrupt? With a question.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

Please. Just permit me to dog-ear the page. Mentally.

T.V. HOST

Forgive me. I beg your pardon.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

Heavens, no. Whatever for?

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

Ready.

T.V. HOST

You've written about the American negro, the French intellectual, the Southern romantic; scripture, mythology, folklore; true crime, false crime; the ghost story, the picaresque, the *bildungsroman* -- but, more than anything, over all these years: you've written about food. Why?

Roebuck Wright stiffens and crosses his arms snugly across his chest. Pause. He counts with five fingers:

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

Who? What? Where? When? How. Valid questions -- but I learned as a cub stringer: never, under any circumstance, if it is remotely within your power to resist the impulse, never ask a man why. It tightens the fellow up.

(referring to his own posture)

Look at me.

T.V. HOST

(hesitates)

I apologize: but I'm going to hold you to it --

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

Torture.

T.V. HOST

-- if you'll allow me.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

(Self-reflection is a vice best conducted in private or not at all.)

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

Well, I'll answer the question, out of sheer weariness, but I truly don't know what I'm about to say.

Silence. Roebuck Wright's arms drop. He sighs deeply and speaks from some new chamber of his mind/heart:

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

There is a particular, sad beauty well-known to the companionless foreigner as he walks the streets of his adopted (preferably, moonlit) city. (In my case, Ennui, France.) I have so often shared the day's glittering discoveries with: no one at all. But always, somewhere along the avenue or the boulevard: there was a table. Set for me. A cook, a waiter, a bottle, a glass, a fire. I chose this life. It is the solitary feast that has been (very much like a comrade) my great comfort and fortification.

A tear (perhaps) rolls down Roebuck Wright's cheek. The T.V. host produces a clean handkerchief and offers it. Roebuck Wright laughs (almost silently) and rolls his eyes as he takes it.

T.V. HOST

Do you remember where you placed the bookmark?

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

Of course. "Meanwhile."
(back to the story)
Meanwhile, across the street:

CUT TO:

The radio, partially reassembled. It crackles to life. A broadcast voice whispers:

POLICE BANDWIDTH

Be informed: suspects' lair is top floor, lower edge of square; officers are already in place around perimeter and surrounding rooftops; maintain extreme discretion and caution approaching location. Repeat...

The scrawny thief scrambles out of the kitchen, jolts into the front window, and pulls the curtains slightly ajar. The other members of the gang instinctively flock around him to look out, as well.

CUT TO:

The gang's point-of-view of the square below: empty. Silence. A single cigarette flicks through the air from behind a corner and sparks onto the cobblestones.

The chauffeur squints.

CUT TO:

The *Commissaire* monitoring the radio. He has a sudden intuition. He peers under the locksmith's blinds. From the top floor flat: one first bang, then a storm of gunfire.

CUT TO:

Inside the lair. The apartment has been flash-converted into a fortress/armory. Pistols, rifles, a machine gun on a tripod, plus a military ordnance grenade launcher. Everyone (chauffeur, Stetson, spinster, showgirls, thugs, thief) blasts away at the square below.

Every window shatters. Bricks and mortar explode. Vehicles are blown to smithereens. The teenage snipers shoot back from the rooftops. Police duck for cover. Blood, smoke, falling bodies, screaming, etc.

The *Commissaire*, on the floor of the locksmith shop, showered in shards and splinters (with his mother, his best friend, and our reporter) repeats over and over into the radio microphone:

COMMISSAIRE

Hold your fire! Hold your fire! Hold your fire!

CUT TO:

A tiny, old man in a mezzanine listening keenly at a radiator down-pipe while the bullets bang and ricochet outside. He puts on a stethoscope, holds it against the tarnished brass, and begins to take notes.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

During a lull in the skirmish, an ancient concierge, veteran of two wars, limped across the street to deliver an enigmatic message.

INSERT:

A scrap of graph paper studded with dots and dashes and a translation below: "S E N D T H E C O O K".

INT. LOCKSMITH SHOP. NIGHT

Above the counter: a final lightbulb pops (gunshot). Silence.

TITLE:

One Hour Later

CUT TO:

The scarred and battered square. The *Commissaire*, hands in the air, steps carefully into view. He carries a loudspeaker. His voice reverberates across the square:

COMMISSAIRE

I'm speaking to the leader of the gang of kidnapers on the top floor.

No response. The *Commissaire* continues:

COMMISSAIRE

Do you have a working kitchen in your lair?

No response. The *Commissaire* continues:

COMMISSAIRE

My son needs a snack. Allow us to send in our precinct cook along with some supplies and provisions. He will prepare a supper of sufficient proportions to feed you and all your accomplices. (We already ate.)

CUT TO:

The gang conferring all at once at a murmur ("Of course not!" "Are they kidding?" "They think we're stupid." etc.) until the chauffeur has a realization. He leans slightly in front of the window and shouts:

CHAUFFEUR

Is it an underling -- or Nescaffier himself?

The *Commissaire* gives a signal. Nescaffier appears. He salutes up to the unseen kidnapers. Aside: he and the *Commissaire* exchange a look of grim defiance (and fear).

INT. SERVICE STAIRS. NIGHT

Nescaffier, cast in dark shadow, carries a short tower of boxes and cartons (meat, produce, bread, butter, etc.) as he calmly ascends the winding steps. On top of the stack: a bowl of radishes -- which appear to glow in the darkness.

INT. KITCHEN. NIGHT

The gang sits on chairs and stools crowded around a breakfast table set with nine identical dinners on segmented, prison-style

plates: a savory winter tart, *purée*, vivid greens, radishes. Two more plates rest on the sideboard. Nescaffier stands apart, hands folded, apron splattered. In the background: the stove, oven, and sink are a battleground strewn with pots, pans, knives, spoons, etc. In the next room: the thief watches the street from the machine gun's telescopic sight.

Nescaffier explains humbly:

NESCAFFIER
Blackbird pie.

Nescaffier backs away slightly.

The chauffeur holds up his finger: wait. He quickly prepares a small side-dish with a taste of each item from his own plate and those of the thug and spinster on either side of him. He hands the dish to Nescaffier.

The gang watches as Nescaffier, without hesitation, takes out his own *fourchette de poche* and eats everything -- including, finally, a single radish.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
Required, of course, to sample each item,
the chef ate the deathly poison --

The thief appears in the doorway to collect his plate, one of the showgirls (murmuring: "for the little boy") carries another plate down the corridor, and the rest of the gang attacks their dinners.

The chauffeur pauses suddenly. The others hesitate, watching. The chauffeur says crisply to Nescaffier:

CHAUFFEUR
Write down the recipe.

Nescaffier nods, and they all continue their voracious grazing.

CUT TO:

The lair as it is breached all at once from three directions: a large hole blasts through one wall, a large drill ruptures through another, the Alpinists drop from a trap door in the ceiling. The apartment fills with climbers and commandos. They all freeze.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)
-- but Nescaffier survived: thanks to the
extreme fortitude (bolstered and braced,
season upon season, by the richest, most
potent plates, pans, and sauce pots) of
his almost superhuman stomach.

Strewn across the floor: dead kidnapers and empty plates. Nescaffier lies -- half-unconscious, shivering, but alive -- among them. The commandos immediately jump to his aid, injecting him with three pre-loaded syringes of brightly colored medicine, slipping a tube down his throat, pipetting droplets into his eyes, massaging arms, legs, heart. As they continue these ministrations, the camera moves out of the room, down the corridor, to the open closet door. On the floor: another plate, not quite empty. A trio of radishes remains.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

He knew well, of course: Gigi loathed and despised the radish in all its forms with a deep, unbridled passion, and had never so much as touched one (or even spoken the word) during his entire young lifetime.

Across the room: one more plate, also with a handful of leftover radishes on it.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

However, as it happened, the chauffeur hated radishes, too.

Outside: an alarm bell rings. The commandos run to the window and look down into the square.

(Note: the following sequence is rendered entirely in the same hand-drawn cel-animation method and style previously established for the hot air balloon getaway.)

CUT TO:

The commandos' P.O.V: straight down from the window looking at the square. The courtyard gate bursts open, and a two-door Citroën sedan (chauffeur at wheel, Gigi beside him) roars out into the square, smashing through barricades and scattering the crowd of officers and onlookers before rumbling away up a blind *impasse* under the street-sign: "Pick-pocket Cul-de-Sac."

The *Commissaire*, *Maman*, *Chou-fleur*, and Roebuck Wright scramble out of the locksmith shop and leap into their own Citroën. The *Commissaire* cranks the motor. It stutters.

After a double-circling U-turn: the chauffeur and Gigi's Citroën comes squealing and careening from the cul-de-sac back into the square. The wrestler springs out of a paddy-wagon, side-steps in front of the weaving vehicle, and hurtles himself onto the hood with a whang. The chauffeur looks shocked. Gigi looks ecstatic. The wrestler rips off the windshield wipers and attempts to pull the car apart while also struggling desperately not to fall off. The chauffeur accelerates through a corner and up a different road.

The *Commissaire* gets the engine going and slams his foot down on the gas pedal, revving up in pursuit of the other vehicle.

Narrow streets. Twisty corners. A tunnel and a bridge. The two cars scream through the sleeping city. At the top of a hill: the chauffeur skids to a stop and jumps out (with the bound Gigi tucked under his arm). He sprints away down a staircase. The wrestler runs after him.

The *Commissaire* jolts to a stop behind the other car. He and Roebuck Wright bounce out and run after the others (*Maman* and *Chou-fleur* stay behind).

A high-speed foot chase takes them down a drainpipe, across a catwalk, under a scaffolding, over a stone wall -- then back up to the parked cars. The chauffeur shoots back into the driver's seat and guns the engine. Just as he tears away, the wrestler manages to jump back onto the hood, furious. The *Commissaire* and Roebuck Wright rejoin *Maman* and *Chou-fleur*, and the car chase resumes.

On a long straightaway: Gigi suddenly pokes up his head from his car's canvas sunroof. He finishes unscrambling the bindings around his arms, and his hands are free. The chauffeur attempts to grab at Gigi while still piloting the Citroën. The *Commissaire* shouts to Roebuck Wright:

COMMISSAIRE

Take the wheel!

The *Commissaire* climbs out the window of the racing vehicle and crawls onto the hood. Roebuck Wright, horrified, lunges into the driver's seat. Gigi pops out fully onto the roof of the other car, then leaps from one moving vehicle back toward the other, sailing through the air, arms and legs splayed -- into his father's arms. They are both knocked back smashing into the windshield (which cracks), then tumble up onto the rooftop and slash down through their own ripping canvas sunroof into the laps of *Maman* and *Chou-fleur*.

The chauffeur misjudges the next turn, slides off the street, cracks through a guardrail, flies bashing into a dry riverbed, and explodes into a spectacular fireball. The wrestler tumbles to safety and lands in "neutral position".

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

Perhaps the most stirring (and startling)
phenomenon witnessed over the trajectory
of that protracted dinner date was this:

In the back seat: Gigi slaps his father hard across the face. The *Commissaire's* hat, glasses, cigarette, hairpiece, and eyebrows all fly off his head in different directions. The *Commissaire* looks astonished, Gigi looks shocked. The

Commissaire quickly re-attaches his false eyebrows -- then both begin to simultaneously laugh and cry. They kiss and embrace.

(Note: resume live-action.)

EXT. POLICE HEADQUARTERS. DAY

A troop of armed police escort a plainclothesman -- carrying the number-cruncher's yellow suitcase handcuffed to his wrist -- across a street to an armored transport. The plainclothesman trips on the curb, the suitcase snaps open, and the air instantly fills with fluttering documents which confetti into an expanding cloud out over the banks of the river.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

Often, in fiction, the illicit treasure which has cost and destroyed so many lives is finally plucked away by the hand of destiny, vaporized into smoke, dispersed to the winds, etc. This did not occur.

The camera booms down below the sidewalk to glimpse an endless underground cache of anonymous file cabinets and forgotten storage boxes. The briefest pause, then the camera booms back up to the cloud of papers.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

The pay stubs remain sealed in a humidity-controlled, underground evidence vault; but: in light of the judicial ruling (due to bribery) which declared the entire trove legally inadmissible --

The camera booms back up to the cloud of papers.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (V.O.)

-- this staged imagining does seem appropriate in its depiction of a grand, thematic pointlessness.

INT. JAIL CELL. DAY

The number-cruncher, still behind bars, eats his breakfast. He looks happy. Seated outside the cell, still connected to a rolling I.V. drip but only slightly the worse for wear, Nescaffier watches and pours himself a glass of the lilac-colored *aperitif* (from a thermos, of course).

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

A delicious irony: M. Albert, accountant to the *demi-monde* and remote cause of the entire spectacular contretemps, had been entirely forgotten in the chicken coop

(more)

ROEBUCK WRIGHT (cont'd)

from Thursday dinner to Monday breakfast and had very nearly starved in his cell. It was only the convalescent M. Nescaffier himself who retained the presence of mind to prepare the prisoner an *omelette à la policier* which he delivered warm, wrapped in a day-old search warrant.

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO. DAY

Back on the talk show, Roebuck Wright concludes:

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

The *Abacus* ate well that morning.

Silence. The host, respectful, turns to camera.

T.V. HOST

A word from Gemini Toothpowder.

INT. WRITER'S OFFICE (ROEBUCK WRIGHT). DAY

On the daybed: Roebuck Wright reposes, smoking, hands folded across his lap. In the corner: the cheery writer reads a pocket atlas and eats breadsticks. At the desk: Howitzer, feet on the table, flips through out-of-order pages. He grumbles:

HOWITZER

It was supposed to be an article about a great chef.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

(untroubled)

It is. In part.

HOWITZER

For the Tastes and Smells section.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

I understand. The assignment was perfectly clear. Perhaps you fail to grasp: I was shot at and hand grenaded against my will. I only asked to be fed (and was, marvelously, as I describe in some detail).

HOWITZER

(doubtful)

Nescaffier only gets one line of dialogue.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

(long pause)

Well, I did cut something he told me. It made me too sad. I could stick it back in, if you like.

HOWITZER

(guardedly optimistic)

What'd he say?

Roebuck Wright floats to the wastebasket, digs briefly, and withdraws a single, crumpled page. He tosses it, underhand, to Howitzer, who snatches it out of the air and snaps it open in one motion.

EXT. LOCKSMITH SHOP. NIGHT

Over the street gutter: the shrouded bodies of the dead kidnapers rest in a neat row along the cobblestones. Below a streetlamp: the *Commissaire* clutches Gigi at his side as he addresses members of the press. Under a white tent: Nescaffier, on a gurney, eyes closed, continues to receive intravenous medication. Roebuck Wright sits next to him on a stool.

Suddenly: Nescaffier speaks:

NESCAFFIER

They had a flavor.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

(hesitates)

I beg your pardon?

NESCAFFIER

The toxic salts. In the radishes. They had a flavor. Totally unfamiliar to me. Like a bitter, moldy, peppery, spicy, oily kind of -- earth. I never tasted that taste in my life. Not very pleasant, extremely poisonous, but still: a new flavor. That's a rare thing, at my age.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

(pause)

I admire your bravery, Lieutenant.

NESCAFFIER

(genuinely)

I'm not brave. I just wasn't in the mood to be a disappointment to everybody.

(in explanation)

I'm a foreigner, you know.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

(long pause)

This city is full of us, isn't it? I'm
one, myself.

Nescaffier is aware of this. He says, slightly delirious:

NESCAFFIER

Seeking something missing. Missing
something left behind.

Roebuck Wright nods in appreciation. He says quietly:

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

Maybe, with good luck, we'll find what
eluded us in the places we once called
home.

Nescaffier smiles sadly and shakes his head: no.

CUT TO:

Howitzer and Roebuck Wright. Howitzer says, pleased/annoyed:

HOWITZER

That's the best part of the whole thing.
That's the reason for it to be written.

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

(flattered/irritated)

I couldn't agree less.

HOWITZER

(hesitates)

Well, anyway, don't cut it.

Postscript
(pages 130 to 132)

INT. EDITORIAL OFFICE. EVENING

On a table: the proofreader. On the couch: the story editor and legal advisor. In the corner: the cheery writer. Also: Berensen, Sazerac, Kremenz. The copy boy (lingering near the door, apparently still employed at the magazine) has tears on his face again -- but, it appears: so does everyone else.

The door opens, and Roebuck Wright enters. He stands, frozen, staring across the room. The alumna looks up from her spiral bound notebook.

ALUMNA

Are we all here? I guess you know. It was a heart attack. He's dead.

On the desk: Howitzer's body, under a tablecloth, surrounded by a multitude of strewn telegrams. A bearded doctor takes off his stethoscope and tucks it into a bag resting on the chest of the corpse.

DOCTOR

Excuse me.

The doctor takes the bag and exits. The alumna grits her teeth, fighting herself -- then, suddenly: she is sobbing. Berensen grips her arm to comfort her (a bit stern). Kremenz points above the door and says simply:

KREMENTZ

No crying.

The alumna immediately stops crying. She takes a deep breath. Roebuck Wright folds back the upper edge of the tablecloth, looks down at Howitzer's face (peaceful) for a moment, then covers him up again. The cheery writer asks grimly:

CHEERY WRITER

Is somebody coming to take him away?

The legal advisor checks his watch. He explains:

LEGAL ADVISOR

There's a strike at the morgue.

In the next room (seen through a glass partition): the doctor makes arrangements on the telephone. The usual waiter enters carrying an American-style birthday cake. He hesitates. Roebuck Wright asks, hands on Howitzer's shoulders:

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

Who was with him?

STORY EDITOR

He was alone. Reading birthday telegrams.

The waiter places the cake onto the table and lights a match. Kremetz interrupts with a blunt:

KREMENTZ

Don't light the candles. He's dead.

Pause. The waiter blows out the match. Sazerac murmurs sadly:

SAZERAC

I'll have a slice.

The waiter prepares cake for Sazerac. Roebuck Wright gestures: just a sliver for me. The alumna pulls herself together.

ALUMNA

We need to draft something. Who wants it?

The proofreader scribbles on a chit, snaps her fingers, and passes the chit to the copy boy as she explains:

PROOFREADER

We've got a file.

The copy boy dashes out the door. Hermès Jones, doodling on a paper napkin, announces:

HERMÈS JONES

I'm working on the art.

INSERT:

The coffee-stain and *confiture* caricature of Howitzer seen at the start of the film, two-thirds finished.

Sazerac studies the picture. He smiles.

SAZERAC

That's him.

Roebuck Wright turns on an electric typewriter (next to the deceased) as he says, including all the assembled reporters:

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

Let's write it together.

The writers variously: push back from their tables, fold their hands in their laps, look up toward the ceiling, look off into space, etc. as they begin to mentally outline the story. The waiter asks, puzzled:

WAITER

Write what?

ALUMNA

The obituary.

The waiter nods, finally understanding. The copy boy returns with a folder which he unfolds on the desk. Roebuck Wright types as he dictates:

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

Arthur Howitzer, Jr. Born in North Kansas, ten miles from the geographical center of the United States.

ALUMNA

Mother died when he was five.

STORY EDITOR

Son of a newspaper publisher, founder of this magazine.

BERENSEN

"The French Dispatch". Previously known as "Picnic".

KREMENTZ

A largely unread Sunday supplement to the Liberty, Kansas Evening Sun.

SAZERAC

It began as a holiday.

HERMÈS JONES

Is that true?

SAZERAC

Sort of.

Mumbling and sad laughter. Roebuck Wright says finally:

ROEBUCK WRIGHT

What happens next?

CUT TO:

The office from the next room (seen through the glass partition). Roebuck Wright resumes typing, and the writers and staff, gathering closer around him, continue to remember and recount.

THE FRENCH DISPATCH

Gallery of images

