

**A GOOD YEAR**

a screenplay by

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Based on the novel by Peter Mayle

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EXT. LE GRIFFON - NIGHT

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

EXT. FARMHOUSE - GARDEN - SAME

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

FRENCH DJ

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

MAX

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

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

MAX'S POV - ENTRANCE TO THE WINE CELLAR

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

BACK TO SCENE

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

THE WINE CELLAR

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

UNCLE HENRY

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

He presents the wine with the flourish of a waiter.

UNCLE HENRY

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

He begins opening the bottle.

UNCLE HENRY

What was I talking about before?

MAX

Blue suits.

UNCLE HENRY

Blue suits?

MAX

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

UNCLE HENRY

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

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

UNCLE HENRY

Now where were we? Whose turn is it?

MAX

Mine.

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

UNCLE HENRY

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

MAX

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

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

UNCLE HENRY

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

(swirls his wine)

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

(holds the wine up to a candle)

And if it rains too little, it'll tell you that too...in it's aroma and bouquet...

(sniffs the wine)

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

(takes a sip)

Ahhh... Delightful.

(then; serious)

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

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

MAX

Yes. I do.

UNCLE HENRY

Well...what is it?

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

MAX

Checkmate.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. LONDON - LAWTON BROTHERS OFFICE BUILDING - MORNING

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

**MANY VINTAGES LATER...**

INT. LAWTON BROTHERS - INVESTMENT BANKING FLOOR - MORNING

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

ANGLE ON - BOND TRADING BULLPEN

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

KENNY

It's up to 115.10, Max. Feels like we oughta move now.

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

MAX

Not yet, Alf.

KENNY

Boss, why do you keep calling me Alf?

MAX

Because you're an Aggressive Little Fucker, Kenny. Let the price come to you, not the other way around.

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

GEMMA

Max Skinner's desk.

(beat)

One moment please.

(to Max)

It's Kimberly.

*explain where he needs*

MAX

Destruct sequence.

GEMMA

(into phone)

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

KENNY

115.40?

MAX

(bolts up)

That's close. Everyone get ready...

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

MAX

Okay people...just remember: we're not here for the dental plan...

KENNY

115.50.

MAX

That's it! Go!

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

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

AMIS

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

TRADER

He can't do that -- there's a gentleman's agreement on the MTS exchange.

AMIS

A gentleman's agreement presupposes there's a gentleman involved.

TRADER #1

Amis, he's put out three billion in sell orders! Prices are crashing!

AMIS

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

SERIES OF SHOTS

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

INT. LAWTON BROTHERS - A BIT LATER

MAX

Where we at?

KENNY

Down two big figures, 113.50!

INT. DEUTSCHE BANK - SAME

Amis studies his screen, wary.

AMIS

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

(MORE)



AMIS (CONT'D)

(panicked)

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

INT. LAWTON BROTHERS - SAME

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

MAX

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

The bullpen erupts into chaos. The CAMERA CLOSSES in on  
Max, who flashes a satisfied, devious grin...

GEMMA

(playful)

Max, when you die, they should  
bury you face down so you know  
which way you're headed...

INT. LOCAL PUB - NIGHT

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

ANCHOR

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

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

KENNY

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

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

MAX

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

ALL IN UNISON

...IT'S THE ONLY THING!"

EXT. MAX'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

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

INT. MAX'S APARTMENT BUILDING - LOBBY

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

BERT

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

INT. ELEVATOR - MOVING UP

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

INT. HALLWAY - MAX'S FLOOR - SECONDS LATER

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

MAX

(simply)  
Fuck.

INT. MAX'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING

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

MAX

Fuck.

INT. TOWN CAR - NEXT MORNING - MOVING

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

MAX

What do you mean he died three months ago?

GEMMA

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

MAX

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

GEMMA

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

MAX

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

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

GEMMA

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

MAX

Who?

GEMMA

Your Uncle.

MAX

Of course.

GEMMA

Well it sure would be nice to see it.

Max pauses for a beat. What is she talking about?

INT. HIP RESTAURANT - NIGHT

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

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

MAX

So what's it worth?

CHARLIE

(affronted)

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

MAX

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

CHARLIE

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

Max grabs a hunk of bread. Starts nibbling.

MAX

Well, it's been a while since I've been there... But I think there were about a half dozen bedrooms. A decent-sized kitchen. Oh yeah, there's also the vineyard. About twenty *hectares*.

CHARLIE

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

MAX

Yeah? What's a chateau goin' for these days? Discreetly, I mean.

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

CHARLIE

At least a "fuck you." Maybe two.

MAX

(delighted)

Bless that old dipso! So? Will you sell it?

CHARLIE

I won't cut my commission.

MAX

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

CHARLIE

In that case...

(holds up his glass)

...here's to fucking you.

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

The CAMERA SLOWLY TRACKS up the aisle...passing rows of businesspeople, all hunched over their laptops and PDA's. WE STOP on Max, who, like everyone else, is tapping away, lost in a digital brick wall of spreadsheets...

EXT. MARSEILLE - MARIGNANE AIRPORT - DAY

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

EXT. ALAMO CAR RENTAL LOT - MINUTES LATER

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

MAX

Dammit Gemma!

With no time to waste, Max squeezes into the Smart Car and starts the engine.

A pussy-ass French pop song BLARES from the speakers, "Moi Lolita." Max adjust the rearview mirror and sees all of the rental car EMPLOYEES staring out the window, mocking him with laughter...

MAX

Bloody Frogs.

INT. MAX'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

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

EXT. SMALL TOWN - CAFE - LATER

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

LATER

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

INT. LONDON - LAWTON BROTHERS - LATER

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

GEMMA

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

MAX (O.S.)

Sharp right. Okay.

GEMMA

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

Beat.

MAX (O.S.)

Do me a favor, Gemma: call the *notaire* and have her leave the keys in the mailbox...then reschedule our appointment for first thing tomorrow morning.

GEMMA

Max, what's the matter? What do you see?

EXT. FRANCE - MAX'S CAR - SAME

Max has pulled into a barnyard of cows.

MAX

Your bonus.

Moo.

EXT. ESTATE - LATE AFTERNOON

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

EXT. DETACHED GARAGE - SAME

Max parks in a rickety detached garage. He grabs his bag and heads toward the house.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - SAME

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

INT. BASTIDE - ENTRYWAY - SAME

Max keys himself in. He can make out the broad steps of a stone staircase rising into the darkness.

MAX

Halloo? 'Allo?

No answer. No one's here to greet him.

## INT. KITCHEN - SAME

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

## INT. UNCLE HENRY'S STUDY - MINUTES LATER

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

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

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

## EXT. LE GRIFFON - VINEYARD - SAME

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

ROUSSEL

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

## EXT. COTTAGE - FAR END OF THE VINEYARD - ESTABLISHING

Smoke drifts from the chimney...

## INT. COTTAGE - SAME

Standing above the hot stove, also staring out at the *bastide*, is LUDIVINE ROUSSEL, 50's, a haughty, overly-made up dragon with orange hair. She's on the phone.



MADAME ROUSSEL

*When will they ever stop invading France?*

ROUSSEL (O.S.)

*It cannot be anything but trouble. He will want to tear out the vines and build a nuclear power station.*

MADAME ROUSSEL

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

EXT. VINEYARD - SAME

MADAME ROUSSEL (O.S.)

*...And for heaven's sake, Clo-Clo, don't go with a face like a boot. Go with a smile.*

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

CLOSE SHOT - MAX'S BARE FEET - LATER

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

EXT. GARDEN - DUSK

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

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

EXT. TENNIS COURT - SECONDS LATER

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

UNCLE HENRY VOICE  
Match point, Max!

WE ARE NOW IN A FLASHBACK...

MAX'S POV -- ON HIS RIGHT

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

MAX'S POV - ON HIS LEFT

YOUNG MAX -- wearing a headband and wristbands and looking like a pint-sized version of Bjorn Borg.

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

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

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

UNCLE HENRY  
Ace! Game, set, match!

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

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

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

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

YOUNG MAX  
Duh. Because I lost.

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

UNCLE HENRY

Max...a man should celebrate his losses as deeply and as often as his victories...

(goadng)

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

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

UNCLE HENRY

Try harder, Max-a-million! Focus!  
Arms up in triumph!

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

MAX

This is stupid.

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

UNCLE HENRY

Someday, Max, you'll come to see that a man learns nothing from winning. The act of losing, however, can elicit great wisdom...to those willing to find it.

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

EDGE OF VINEYARD - SECONDS LATER

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

VOICE

*Salut Max!*

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

MAX

Russell?

ROUSSEL

(amused)

All these years and still your French has not improved! It is Roussel. Roo-sell.

MAX

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

ROUSSEL

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

BARK! BARK!

ROUSSEL

My dog, Tati.

Max stares down at the blue terrier.

ROUSSEL

(gestures; *c'est la vie*)

Spraying the vines.

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

ROUSSEL

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

MAX

(excuse)

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

ROUSSEL

(tear in his eye)

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

MAX

(jerking harder)

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

ROUSSEL

My wife will come in the morning...with croissants.

MAX

Oh no -- that's not necessary.

ROUSSEL

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

MAX

If you insist.

Max finally kicks off the dog.

MAX

Well... *Bon nuit*, Mr. Roussel.

ROUSSEL

*A demain.*

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

ROUSSEL

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

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

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

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

MAX

Hello?

GEMMA (O.S.)

We're-- Excuse me, you're in deep shit, Max.

INT. LAWTON BROTHERS - BOND TRADING BULLPEN - SAME

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

GEMMA

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

MAX

That's what you woke me for?

GEMMA

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

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - SAME

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

MAX

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

KENNY (O.S.)

(jumps on)

I'm here, boss.

MAX

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

KENNY

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

MAX

Kenny -- want to know why God made economists? To make the weathermen look good. Now both of you toddle back to work and make me some more money.

GEMMA

What else would one do with one's  
life?

Max hangs up. On the window sill, he notices a heap of moldy lavender sitting in a cheap plastic dish. It looks disgusting. He makes a face and tosses it into the trash.

INT. KITCHEN - MINUTES LATER

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

MAX

Praise Jesus.

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

MAX

Ah, good morning. Madame Roussel,  
I presume?

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

MADAME ROUSSEL

(shooing him out)  
*Attendez dans le jardin! Je  
retrouve petit déjeuner pour  
monsieur Max! (Go to the garden!  
I will bring Mr. Max his  
breakfast!)*

Petrified, Max retreats from the kitchen...

EXT. GARDEN - LATER

Max sits in the garden, beneath the trellis, tapping away on his Blackberry. Suddenly, he's startled by -- SLAM! -- Madame Roussel drops a tray of breakfast on the table. Coffee. Croissants. Jam. Butter.

MADAME ROUSSEL

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

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

MAX  
Greetings, Charlie.

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

INT. LONDON - GEORGIAN TOWNHOUSE - SAME

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

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

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

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

The couple notice a leak dripping from the ceiling.

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

EXT. GARDEN - SAME

Max appraises the *bastide* in the bright morning light.

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

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

MAX  
And the wine...it's...I don't  
know...



CHARLIE

...young and promising? Oh, on the subject of plonk, one thing everyone's asking for is an *oenologue's* report.

MAX

What the hell is that?

CHARLIE

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

MAX

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

CHARLIE

Off to tour the vines?

MAX

No. Off to inherit.

INT. MAX'S CAR - MOVING - MORNING

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

EXT. ROAD - REVERSE ANGLE

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

INT. APPROACHING CITROEN - SAME

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

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN

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

The Beautiful Woman frantically swerves to avoid a collision. Her car CAREENS off the road, and SLAMS headfirst into an irrigation ditch.

INT. MAX'S CAR - MOVING - SAME

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

EXT. ROADSIDE - SAME

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

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN

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

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

EXT. LOURMARIN - RUE HENRI SAVORNIN - MORNING

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

INT. MAITRE AUZET'S OFFICE - MORNING

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

SECRETARE

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

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

AUZET (O.S.)

*Minna-san, doumo arigatou gozaimashita.*

They all bow and quickly shuffle out into the street.

AUZET

Mr. Skinner?

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

INT. AUZET'S OFFICE - A BIT LATER

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

AUZET

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

(gets serious)

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

MAX

My intentions are simple: I don't plan on becoming a vintner.

AUZET

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

MAX

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

AUZET

(astounded)

This is something you discussed with your Uncle?

MAX

Actually, no, we hadn't spoken in years. Nonetheless, my decision is made.

AUZET

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

MAX

Ms. Auzet, I just hoodwinked the entire London Bond market -- I think I can handle a peasant from the South of France.

(shifting)

Now on an entirely different note, I wonder if you might help me find an...oenologue? Someone to tell me what condition my vines are in.

AUZET

(thinking about it)

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

MAX

Good, then, I'll leave the details to you...

(stands)

Now if there's nothing else, I've got a plane to catch...

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

MAX

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

AUZET

Under normal circumstances I'd have said no.

INT. MAX'S CAR - MOVING

Max pulls out of town...en route to the airport. He's on his Blackberry with Charlie, effusive.

MAX

Charlie -- it's official: I'm part of the landed gentry!

CHARLIE (O.S.)

How 'bout the oenologue?

MAX

Happening.

CHARLIE

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

MAX

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

CHARLIE

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

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

EXT. LE GRIFFON - DAY

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

EXT. VINEYARD - DAY

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

GEMMA (O.S.)

Max, eleven here, twelve there--

MAX

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

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

MAX

Oh shit--

ROUSSEL

You would cast away my vines...!

MAX

Ms. Auzet ratted me out--?

ROUSSEL

...to a mere stranger!?

MAX

(cool)

They're not your vines, Roussel.  
They're my vines.

ROUSSEL

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

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

ROUSSEL

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

Max's Blackberry starts vibrating. He ignores it.

MAX

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

ROUSSEL

(disdainful)

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

MAX

I'm afraid so.

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

MAX

What!

GEMMA (O.S.)

Get in the fucking car and drive!

EXT. POOL - MINUTES LATER

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

MAX

AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

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

MAX

Fuck that hurt!

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

MAX

What the--?  
(then)  
Phone.

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

MAX

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

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

LATER

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

MAX

Oh please, baby. Come to papa.

INT. LONDON - TOWN CAR - MOVING - SAME

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

GEMMA

Where are you, you fucking tosser?

INT. POOL - SAME

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

MAX

Oh please God, yes.

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

EXT. ROAD - AFTERNOON

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

WOMAN'S POV - LE GRIFFON - DRIVEWAY

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

EXT. DRIVEWAY - SECONDS LATER

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

MAX (O.S.)

...they're rounding the far turn...heading for home...and down the stretch...Gates is leading by a nose...!



She HEARS Max's VOICE...and follows it...around the side of the house...through the garden...and past the tennis court...

EXT. POOL - SAME

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

MAX

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

Then, interrupting him from above:

WOMAN'S VOICE

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

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

FANNY

*Non parelez-francais? Parlez-vous anglais?*

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

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN

Is that your car?

MAX

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

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

FANNY

Can you swim?

MAX

(perplexed)  
Excuse me?

FANNY

Can you swim?

MAX

Of course I can swim.

Fanny disappears.

MAX

Hey! HEY!

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

MAX

WHAT THE HELL--!

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

MAX

ARE YOU MAD! HELP ME OUT OF HERE!

But Fanny is not answering. She's gone.

EXT. POOL - LATER

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

MAX

BANZAI!!!

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

EXT. POOL - SUNSET

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

EXT. POOL - NIGHT

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

INT. BASTIDE - STAIRWELL - NIGHT

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

MAX  
Suspended!? For what?

INT. LONDON - LAWTON BROTHERS - SAME

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

MAX (O.S.)  
Oh Jesus!

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

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

GEMMA  
Anything else?

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

INT. LOURMARIN POLICE DEPARTMENT - SAME

A tiny, one-room station. The town's extremely young GENDARME, 21, with a well-coiffed mullet, watches a dubbed version of "The Godfather." The phone begins to RING. But the cop couldn't care less. Finally, an answering machine picks up. Yes, an answering machine!

MAX'S VOICE  
 (dripping with irony)  
 Hi, it's Osama Bin Laden calling.  
 I suddenly felt the urge to turn  
 myself in, but I guess now's not  
 the best time for you guys. Okay,  
 I'll try back after Ramadan...  
 Asalam Alakom.

Beep. The Gendarme is completely unfazed.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. LE GRIFFON - MORNING - ESTABLISHING

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

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

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

MAX  
 Holy shit! MADAME ROUSSEL!  
 MADAME ROUSSEL!

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

MADAME ROUSSEL  
 Lavande!? Lavande!?

MAX  
 In English, Madame Roussel! In  
English!

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

MADAME ROUSSEL  
 Lavande.

EXT. LE GRIFFON - DRIVEWAY - LATER

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

MAX

Bollocks!

CLOSE SHOT - MAX'S CAR TIRES

They are all slashed...flat.

MAX (O.S.)

It's not just destruction of  
property!

CAMERA PULLS BACK TO REVEAL...

EXT. DRIVEWAY - LATER

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

MAX

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

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

Finally, the Gendarme nods. Snaps his notebook shut.

MAX

(to Madame Roussel)  
You're sure he got it all?

MADAME ROUSSEL

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

Irate, Max snaps the notebook from the Gendarme.

MAX

(reading)  
6 carrots... 40 grams of butter...

Suddenly, everyone's engulfed in a plume of orange mist.

ANGLE ON - EDGE OF VINEYARD

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

MAX

What the hell is he doing!?

BACK TO SCENE

Max is coughing and cursing... When the dust finally clears, someone else has appeared in the driveway: a pretty BLONDE GIRL, 21, with a backpack. The Blonde Girl is wearing shorts, flip-flops, and a San Francisco Giants baseball hat.

BLONDE GIRL

(perfect French)

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

All point to Max. She turns to him and smiles, flashing her blindingly white teeth.

MAX

The only country that issues teeth like that is America.

BLONDE GIRL

Oh, you speak English.

MAX

Like a native.

BLONDE GIRL

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

MAX

That's me.

CHRISTIE

(chuckles)

Impossible, you're way too young.

MAX

(sexual innuendo)

Funny, I was just going to say the same thing about you.

CHRISTIE

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

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

INSERT - PHOTO ON GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE

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

MAX

That's your Mum?

CHRISTIE

In all her Flashdance-glory.

Madame Roussel studies Christie's face.

MADAME ROUSSEL

She has *Henri's* nose!

CHRISTIE

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

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S STUDY - MINUTES LATER

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

CHRISTIE

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

MAX

You said you hail from California?

CHRISTIE

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

(MORE)

CHRISTIE (CONT'D)

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

MAX

(skeptical)

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

CHRISTIE

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

MAX

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

CHRISTIE

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

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

MAX

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

CHRISTIE

You were supposed to ask that first.

EXT. BACK TERRACE - A BIT LATER

A wonderful view of the estate spreads out below them. She smokes; he keeps glancing at his watch.



CHRISTIE  
Kinda freaky, actually. Dad  
shackin' up in France I mean.

MAX  
Why's that?

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

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

CHRISTIE  
Why'd he settle down here, then?

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

Max's Blackberry vibrates.

MAX  
Hello?

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

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

INT. DEUTSCHE BANK - BOND TRADING FLOOR - SAME

Amis sits behind his desk, his headset on.

MAX (O.S.)

It was so generous of you to contribute to my Aston-Martin fund. I'm afraid your donation isn't tax-deductible, though.

AMIS

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

INT. TERRACE - SAME

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

MAX

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

CHRISTIE

You a money guy?

MAX

How could you tell?

CHRISTIE

How could you not?

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

CHRISTIE

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

MAX

Sure... Come on.

EXT. LOURMARIN - RUE HENRI SAVORNIN - LATER

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

INT. MAX'S CAR - IDLING

Max hands Christie his business card.

MAX

Give me a call if you make it to London.

(lecherous)

We'll have a drink.

CHRISTIE

I'm twenty-one Max, I don't do business cards...

(she hands the card back)

...and I don't do my cousins.

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

MAX

Changed your mind about lunch, eh?

behind her desk.  
INT. MAITRE AUZET'S OFFICE - A BIT LATER

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

MAX

But she never even met my Uncle!

AUZET

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

INT. MAITRE AUZET'S OFFICE - WAITING AREA - SAME

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

CHRISTIE

Not for sale.

INT. MAITRE AUZET'S OFFICE - SAME

MAX

Has it occurred to you that she could be an imposter?

AUZET

That is precisely why I must submit this photo to a judge for immediate review. If he deems it sufficient evidence of her affiliation, he will order the disinterment of your Uncle's body and a DNA test to establish paternity.

MAX

Disinterment? Ugh, that's horrible.

AUZET

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

MAX

Come again?

AUZET

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

MAX

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

AUZET

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

MAX

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

AUZET

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

Auzet's *Secrtaire* KNOCKS and enters. She motions to the three Saudis who have arrived.

AUZET

Ah, *bon*.

(standing up)

Mr. Skinner, with luck, we'll have a ruling in a few days...

As Auzet leads Max to her door--

MAX

By the way, where's my *oenologue*?

AUZET

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

She opens the door for him.

THE WAITING AREA

AUZET

(to Saudis; in fluent Arabic)

*Gentleman, I won't be more than a few minutes.*

(to Christie)

Ms. Roberts? Please come in...

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

INT. MAX'S CAR - MOVING

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

GEMMA (O.S.)

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

MAX

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

GEMMA

And what do you plan on telling Sir Lawton: that you're going on holiday while the entire Square Mile is gunning for your arse!

INT. LONDON - LAWTON BROTHERS - SAME

MAX (O.S.)

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

GEMMA

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

ANGLE ON - KENNY

Who's sitting behind Max's desk, sweet-talking a girl...

KENNY

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

INT. MAX'S CAR - MOVING

MAX

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

Something up ahead catches Max's attention...

MAX'S POV - THROUGH WINDSHIELD

The local Citroen auto shop. He sees the Beautiful Woman standing in the garage, screaming at a MECHANIC's legs, which stick out from underneath her car.

MAX

Gotta go, Gemma.

He hangs up on her.

EXT. SERVICE STATION - SAME

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

MAX

Remember me? Aquaman.

WOMAN

(amused)

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

MAX

Your concern for my welfare is touching.

WOMAN

Monsieur, the suffering you endured is incomparable to the state of my arm...

(points to her sling)

...and my precious Citroen, thanks to your incompetent driving. Are you in the habit of running people off the road and leaving the scene of a crime?

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

WOMAN

Look at the passenger seat...

(it's charred beyond recognition)

To find a vintage replacement will be impossible!

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

MAX

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

He reaches into his wallet. Pulls out a wad of cash.

WOMAN

(condescending)

It is clear, Monsieur, that you  
learned nothing from your Uncle.

She pedals off.

MAX

Wait! You knew my Uncle?!

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

MAX

Pardon! Who is that lady?

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

MECHANIC

That is Fanny Chenal.

MAX

(so familiar)

Fanny...Fanny...?

(awestruck)

Hey, I think I remember her... Did  
she grow up here, in Lourmarin?

MECHANIC

I believe so, yes.

(switches off his  
radio; warning)

Monseur...recall what Marcel  
Proust said: "Leave pretty women  
to men without imagination."

MAX

I'm a banker, I have no  
imagination.

INT. BASTIDE - THIRD FLOOR - AFTERNOON

Max abruptly shuffles Christie into an attic guest room--

MAX

(curt)

This is your room.

CHRISTIE

How lovely...the bastard child  
gets the mothballed garret.



MAX

Ground rules: don't get near the study...

CHRISTIE

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

MAX

...don't poke around the wine cellar...

CHRISTIE

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

MAX

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

Max heads <sup>winter</sup> for the stairs.

CHRISTIE

Hey Max.

(he stops)

You're my cousin, not my father. *Capisce?*

She slams her door in his face.

EXT. GARDEN - DUSK

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

KENNY (O.S.)

Brilliant move on those futures, boss. We cleared close to four million pounds today!

INT. LONDON - LAWTON BROTHERS - SAME

Kenny sits at Max's work-station.

MAX (O.S.)

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

Kenny jumps up.

KENNY

Of course, Max-- Sorry.

MAX

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

KENNY

24-hours a day, boss.

MAX

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

EXT. GARDEN - SAME

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

MADAME ROUSSEL

MONSEUR MAX!

(Max is startled)

*Diner!*

INT. DINING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

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

MAX

Madame Roussel, she's my cousin.

(backpedaling)

Maybe.

MADAME ROUSSEL

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

Madame Roussel exits. A wonderful meal awaits Max:  
*fromage, charcuterie, and foie gras*. There is, however,  
one ugly sight: an opened bottle of *Le Griffon* wine.

INT. WINE CAVE - EVENING

Max scans the rack of wine...so many choices. Nothing  
seems to strike his fancy...until he hones in on a dozen  
unlabeled bottles of red. In grease pencil, scribbled on  
the underside of each bottle, is written:

2000

Intrigued, he grabs one.

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

MAX'S POV - ABOVE HIM

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

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

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

YOUNG MAX'S POV - INTO VAT

Filled to the rim with bubbling, fermenting red wine.

YOUNG MAX  
*Fervere.*

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

YOUNG MAX  
(confident)  
*Fervere.* It's a Latin term. It means "to boil." The native yeasts in your cellar are converting the sugar inside the grapes to alcohol. The release of carbon dioxide gas is what causes the bubbling effect.

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

YOUNG MAX  
You didn't. That Russell guy explained it to me.

UNCLE HENRY

Well done. Proves the adage that wisdom can be found in the most unlikely places. Someday, Max, you should take it upon yourself to observe Mr. Roussel in his native habitat. To watch him on bended knee, doing something as simple as weeding his soil... there's a magnificent poetry in his devotion to each and every grape. Perhaps he'll inspire you to find devotion in what you do for a living someday?

YOUNG MAX

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

UNCLE HENRY

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

Max chuckles, as the reverie fades away.

INT. DINING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

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

CHRISTIE

Mmmm. Formidable.

She studies the bottle.

CHRISTIE

Is this made here...on the estate?

MAX

I guess.

CHRISTIE

Why's it in a Bordeaux-shaped bottle, then?

She grabs the 2000 bottle and holds it up next to the *Le Griffon* bottle. They are shaped differently.

CHRISTIE

(more swirling)

It has a darker robe than the usual Bordeaux. An oxblood ruby. Velvet, rather than wool...

(sips again)

It's a brave wine...one with great honesty.

Max pauses. Sounds a little like Uncle Henry.

MAX

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

CHRISTIE

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

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

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Hello?

MAX'S VOICE

Quick question, mate: is it illegal to shag your own cousin?

CHARLIE

Only if she's ugly.

INT. CHRISTIE'S BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

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

EXT. BASTIDE - NIGHT

The moon hangs in the sky, a perfect, glowing, orb. Only two lights are on inside the *bastide*: the dining room and Christie's bedroom.

REVERSE SHOT - THE ROUSSEL'S COTTAGE - TERRACE

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

MADAME ROUSSEL

*Perhaps we have been saved, Clo-  
Clo?*

Roussel listens patiently to the breeze.

ROUSSEL

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

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. LE GRIFFON - NEXT MORNING

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

CHRISTIE (O.S)

Omigod! Help! Scorpions!

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

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S STUDY - LATER

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

MAX

(frustrated)

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

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

MAX

Do you ever think about my Uncle,  
Madame Roussel?

MADAME ROUSSEL

No.

(beat)

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

She returns to scouring. Then stops.

MADAME ROUSSEL

But he was an excellent dancer.

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

MADAME ROUSSEL

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

MAX

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

MADAME ROUSSEL

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

Madame Roussel exits in a frantic rush.

EXT. VINEYARD - SAME

Christie sips coffee and wanders the vineyard. She reaches a wall of trees that seem to mark the end of the property-line. But notices a small, arch-like opening...so she walks through, and finds herself beneath a canopy of dense trees. It's dark here, and the air is considerably cooler. A few hundred feet down the way, she advances toward a burst of light that floods through the outlet on the other side of the grove...

Christie finally emerges into the blinding whiteness. When her eyes adjust, she sees she's standing on yet another *hectare* of vines. Oddly, these vines aren't growing in dark soil, but are planted in gleaming white, limestone pebbles. It's otherworldly. Before she can survey things, though, she suddenly hears a GGRRRRROWL. It's Tati (who's the shade of green today).

ROUSSEL (O.S.)

*Tati, non!*

Roussel appears, and the dog sits.

CHRISTIE

*Bon jour, Monseuir. Je suis--*

ROUSSEL

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

CHRISTIE

*You knew my father?*

ROUSSEL

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

CHRISTIE

*(surveying hectare)*

*It appears you've succeeded...  
Indeed, last night I had the  
opportunity to sample your 2000  
vintage. It was lovely...*

ROUSSEL

*Merci.*

CHRISTIE

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

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

ROUSSEL

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

CHRISTIE

*Well that explains the shape of  
the bottle.*

ROUSSEL

*I see you are no stranger to  
viticulture.*

CHRISTIE

*Oh, I'm a wine brat. Spent my  
summers working at a Santa Rosa  
vineyard.*



ROUSSEL

*Ach! They do not make wine in California, they make...how do you say...Hawaiian Punch.*

CHRISTIE

*The Mondavi's might argue that point.*

ROUSSEL

*Perhaps Monseuir's daughter could be persuaded to the Gallic way by a personal tour of a French cave?*

CHRISTIE

*I'd be delighted.*

ROUSSEL

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

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

EXT. LOURMARIN - RUE HENRI SAVORNIN - MORNING

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

MAX

Fanny!

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

FANNY

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

MAX

Do you remember me?

FANNY

Of course. The idiot in the pool.

MAX

No. I'm Max Skinner.

(nothing)

Think back. It was summer.

(MORE)

MAX (CONT'D)

Years ago...

(still nothing)

You couldn't have been more than twelve. You and your Mom came to visit *Le Griffon* and...

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

FANNY

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

MAX

Especially one so...vivid.

FANNY

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

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

MAX

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

Fanny smiles. Max is hard not to like.

MAX

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

FANNY

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

She points. They are now standing across from--

EXT. CHEZ FANNY - SAME

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

MAX

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

FANNY

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

Max watches this wonderful woman disappear into her cafe.

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - EVENING

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

EXT. VINEYARD - EVENING

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

MAX

What's happening, Charlie?

CHARLIE (O.S.)

The photos worked like a charm,  
mate. We're now into multiple  
bids...with an old South African  
wine family in lead position.  
Things are getting critical --  
it's time for me to be on-site. I  
booked a flight and should be in  
tomorrow afternoon.

MAX

Terrific. I'll alert the staff.

EXT. ROUSSEL'S COTTAGE - EVENING

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

Max KNOCKS. Roussel answers, dressed in black trousers, a crisp white shirt, and a big, friendly, smile.

ROUSSEL

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

Max is suspicious. Why is he being so nice?

EXT. BACK OF HOUSE - KENNEL - SECONDS LATER

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

ROUSSEL

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

MAX

Mailmen?

EXT. SIDE OF HOUSE - VEGETABLE GARDEN - SECONDS LATER

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

MAX

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

ROUSSEL

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

MAX

But she owns a restaurant.

ROUSSEL

God grants his gifts sparingly, I'm afraid.

MAX

No ex-husband...or a boyfriend?

ROUSSEL

Once there was a racecar driver, from Italy.

(MORE)

ROUSSEL (CONT'D)

He treated her very poorly,  
though. People say she is now a  
*lesbienne*...others, frigid.

MAX

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

ROUSSEL

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

MAX

...assume yes, or assume no?

Roussel shrugs.

ROUSSEL

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

EXT. TERRACE - EVENING

Roussel leads Max out to an enormous tiled terrace, with  
a stunning view of the vineyard and the Luberon Valley.  
Surprise -- Christie's here too, standing by the rail,  
sipping a pastis. She looks gorgeous, her hair swept up  
and a slim black dress kissing her body.

ROUSSEL

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

MAX

(to Christie; sotto)

I see you and your septum have  
managed to ingratiate yourselves  
with the help.

CHRISTIE

Some people know what the word  
hospitality means.

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

ROUSSEL

My father-in-law, Gerard.

MAX

*Enchante.*

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

ROUSSEL

(whispering)

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

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

MAX

Ooh la lard.

ROUSSEL

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

CHRISTIE

(stunned)

This isn't dinner?

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

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

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

ROUSSEL

A simple meal...such as a man might have after a day's work in the fields...

(points to each dish)

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

CHRISTIE

Headless?

(panicked)

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

ROUSSEL

...and finally...civet of wild  
boar, made in the correct fashion,  
with red wine and blood pressed  
from the carcass.

MAX

Why would one have it any other  
way?

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

CHRISTIE

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

MADAME ROUSSEL

Papa only speaks *Provençal*; the  
language of Mistral.

ROUSSEL

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

Papa returns with another bottle of red.

MADAME ROUSSEL

*Non, Papa!*

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

ROUSSEL

(explaining)

It is a special vintage...we are  
waiting for it to mature.

(to Madame Roussel)

It's okay, Ludivine...

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

CHRISTIE

(reading the label)

*Le Coin Perdu?*

(amused)

Does that mean what I think it  
does?

ROUSSEL

The godforsaken spot. *Oui.*

Abruptly changing the subject--

MADAME ROUSSEL

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

MAX

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

CHRISTIE

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

MAX

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

Papa Roussel turns to Max and mumbles something.

MAX

What did he say?

ROUSSEL

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

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

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

CHRISTIE

What is it?

ROUSSEL

*Marc de Provence.* I made it myself. You must...



CHRISTIE  
*C'est tout. No mas. No more...*  
 (room spinning)  
 Oh boy, I think it's time for me  
 to go...

She stands, holding onto the table for balance.

MADAME ROUSSEL  
 Papa will walk you home.

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

Papa farts.

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

Christie stumbles out.

MAX  
 Must have been the cookies.

ROUSSEL  
 (to Max)  
 We will talk now.

EXT. TERRACE - SECONDS LATER

Max and Roussel are back on the terrace, alone.

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

ROUSSEL  
 (offers a glass)  
 More *marc*?

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

ROUSSEL  
 It is true that an outright  
 purchase is beyond my reach.  
 (MORE)

ROUSSEL (CONT'D)

But given my *histoire* with your Uncle, I felt that you might consider a monthly payment plan...directly to you.

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

ROUSSEL

I think you will see it is a fair amount.

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

MAX

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

ROUSSEL

Estate agent? But they are all bandits!

MAX

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

EXT. ROUSSEL'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

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

CHRISTIE

(babbling)

No more. Please. No more food.

INT. BASTIDE - STAIRWELL - LATER

Max carries Christie upstairs.

CHRISTIE

Beaks are for pecking, Max -- not for eating.

## INT. CHRISTIE'S BEDROOM - LATER

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

MAX

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

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

CHRISTIE

*Bonsoir, Max-a-million.*

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

## EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

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

## INT. CHEZ FANNY - NIGHT

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

MAX

Fanny?  
 (no answer)  
 Fan-eeeeee!

FANNY

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

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

FANNY

I thought you might be hungry.

MAX

Oh, I--

FANNY

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

MAX

Starving. Really, I am. What is it?

FANNY

My specialty.

She lifts the lid.

FANNY

Pigeon.

EXT. RUE HENRI SAVORNIN - LATER THAT NIGHT

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

FANNY

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

MAX

(heavyhearted)

Did he say we lost touch?

FANNY

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

MAX

(guilty; defensive)

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

FANNY

I am not sure if that is what he feared was lost.

MAX

I gave up apologizing for my life a long time ago. Truth is, Uncle Henry just couldn't accept that this place doesn't fit my life.

FANNY

So long as you are happy.

MAX

I am when I win.

FANNY

*Porquoi?*

Max has to think about this.

MAX

Because I hate to lose.

FANNY

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

MAX

(innuendo)

It's not a firm rule.

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

MAX

May I see you tomorrow?

FANNY

Tomorrow is Chopin, at the town Chateau...

(points up to  
Chateau)

I will be catering.

MAX

So? I love French music.

FANNY

Chopin was Polish.

(smiles)

But you are welcome anyway...

Adieu Max Skinner.

She pulls out into the night, leaving Max feeling something he hasn't in a long time: happy.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. KITCHEN - NEXT MORNING

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

MAX

Madame Roussel? Does your husband know you're here?

MADAME ROUSSEL

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

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

MAX

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

GEMMA (O.S.)

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

INT. LONDON - STREET - SAME

Gemma walks on the sidewalk to work...

GEMMA

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

MAX (O.S.)

That little twit.

GEMMA

Max, whatever life crisis you're going through down there, I think it's right time you sobered up, pulled the hayseeds out of your hair, and come back here... otherwise, there may be nothing to come back to.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

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

CHRISTIE

Water. Lots of water.

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

MADAME ROUSSEL

Pastis, wine and *marc* -- a recipe for catastrophe. *C'est fou.*

CHRISTIE

Coffee. Lots of coffee.

KNOCK! KNOCK! It's the front door.

EXT. BATSIDE - SAME

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

BUREAUCRAT

*Parlez-vous Français?*

MAX

Oh-- Uh-- *J'regrete...mon français est...tres mal.*

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

ROUSSEL

I will be happy to translate.

The Bureaucrat speaks to Roussel, who translates...

ROUSSEL

My name is Denis Allary. I am the regional inspector for the INAO...

MAX

What's that?

ROUSSEL

(explaining)

*Institut National des Appellations d'Origine.* It is the regulatory authority that oversees compliance with all laws regarding the making of wine...

(listens; translates)

Unfortunately, after a thorough inspection of your vineyard, I have found several infractions.

MAX

What sort of infractions?

Roussel listens to Denis. Nods. Translates.

ROUSSEL

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

MAX

(incredulous)

This is a joke--

ROUSSEL

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

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

MAX

Fifteen thousand Euros?!

ROUSSEL

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

Now Max gets it. Roussel is behind this.

MAX

(to Roussel)

You know this guy, don't you?

ROUSSEL

(offended)

Patronage between winemaker and Inspector is strictly prohibited.



Roussel smiles, cunningly. Bastard.

INT. RESTAURANT CLAIR HOULLEBECQ - DAY

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

MAX

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

AUZET

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

MAX

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

AUZET

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

MAX

So? He'll be able to keep the cases separate...

(suddenly concerned)

Won't he?

AUZET

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

MAX

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

AUZET

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

MAX

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

AUZET

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

EXT. POOL - DAY

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

MAX

What do you think you're doing?

CHRISTIE

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

MAX

Those are my Uncle's private  
papers.

CHRISTIE

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

Max snaps the papers out of her hand.

MAX

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

CHRISTIE

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

She gets up and picks up the shoe boxes--

MAX

I said hands off my stuff--!

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

CHRISTIE

Dickhead!

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

EXT. POOL - LATER

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

WOMAN'S VOICE

(letter from a  
mistress:)

...Henry, my love, Gstad is cold  
and empty without you...

UNCLE HENRY'S VOICE

(diary entry)

...the benefits of Aleppo soap are  
unproven by science -- and that is  
why I have faith in its powers...

MAX'S VOICE

(another letter:)

...my first month on the job and I  
can barely keep my eyes open. You  
think maybe you can send me some  
of that muddy coffee you used to  
drink? I've been telling everyone  
here that when I get a break, I'm  
going to my vineyard in Provence.  
They think I'm barking mad. Shit,  
only one month and I'm already  
thinking about vacation. Bad  
sign, huh? You know, Uncle Henry,  
I'm only 23, but I'm beginning to  
see that the struggle of life  
isn't about getting what you want,  
but about what you're willing to  
give up to get it...

It's a brutally profound message; from his younger self no less... Then, Max comes upon a photo...and double-takes. He looks closely:

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

MAX

Oh...shit...

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

HONK! HONK!

MAX'S POV - THE DRIVEWAY

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

EXT. BASTIDE - DRIVEWAY - SECONDS LATER

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

CHARLIE

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

MAX

SHHHH!

(looks up at  
Christie's window)

Jesus, Charlie, the whole world doesn't need to know our business.

CHARLIE

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

EXT. GARDEN - LATER

Max has just downloaded Charlie on everything.

CHARLIE

Max, I can't sell a house you don't legally own.

MAX

The judge's decision is due any minute now. All I want you to do is proceed as though nothing's wrong. No need to spook any of the buyers before there's a problem, right?

CHARLIE

I suppose not.

MAX

Now what's going on with the South Africans?

CHARLIE

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

(looking around)

But enough business-talk. I want to enjoy the country... What's on the agenda? Steak *frites*? Bottle of Ricard? An afternoon game of bridge?

MAX

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

(points to his  
outfit)

Loosen up for God's sake.

Max gets up.

CHARLIE

Where are you going?

MAX

Cultural activity with an old friend.

CHARLIE

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

MAX  
 You're not alone.  
 (points upstairs)  
 She's here.

Off Charlie's look of terror...

INT. MAX'S CAR - MOVING

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

INT. LONDON - LAWTON BROTHERS - SAME

Kenny's cellphone rings. He answers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

KENNY  
 It's Kenny over at Lawton. I'd  
 like to put in a bid for Monday's  
 gilt issue. 99.10 for the whole  
 six billion...

INT. DEUTSCHE BANK - BOND TRADING FLOOR - SAME

Amis is walking out to leave for the day.

TRADER

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

Amis stops. Leans over and looks at the monitor.

TRADER

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

AMIS

Yes. I suppose we could...

INT. BASTIDE + UNCLE HENRY'S STUDY - NIGHT

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

CHRISTIE (O.S.)

Help! HELP!

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

CHRISTIE

Anyone! Please!

INT. CHRISTIE'S ROOM - SECONDS LATER

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

CHRISTIE

Who's that?

CHARLIE

(frozen)

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

She quickly grabs a towel. Covers her butt.

CHRISTIE

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

Charlie edges closer, nervously.

CHARLIE

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

CHRISTIE

Oh God--

CHARLIE

I'll fetch a doctor.

CHRISTIE

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

CHARLIE

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

CHRISTIE

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

CHARLIE

Perhaps she drank too much sangria  
and needed a flush?

CHRISTIE

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

Charlie moves to leave--

CHRISTIE

By the way, I'm Christie.

CHARLIE

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

CHRISTIE

Love your accent.

CHARLIE

Love your bum.

EXT. LOURMARIN - EVENING

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



Max squeezes his Smart Car into a tiny space between an ice cream cart and a statue.

EXT. CHATEAU - EVENING

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

ANGLE ON - CATERING AREA

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

MAX

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

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

MAX

Whoa--!

FANNY

One of my servers called in sick tonight...

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

FANNY

You are in charge of tables three and six.

MAX

Wait a second-- Can we talk about this?

FANNY

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

She pushes him off.

EXT. CHATEAU - COURTYARD - EVENING

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

## SERIES OF SHOTS

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

## INT. CHRISTIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

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

CHARLIE

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

CHRISTIE

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

CHARLIE

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

(hard sell)

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

CHRISTIE

Except Keith Richards.

CHARLIE

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

CHRISTIE

Uh, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Yes, luv?

CHRISTIE

Hands off my ass.

CHARLIE

(sputtering)

Oh-- Terribly sorry--

EXT. CHATEAU - COURTYARD - EVENING

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

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

Career change?

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

did you sleep with her?

MAX

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

AUZET

Penance?

MAX

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

He exchanges a smile with Fanny.

AUZET

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

MAX

I'll be there... *Bonsoir.*

Auzet heads off. Fanny shoots her dagger eyes.

MAX

What's the matter? Don't like redheads?

FANNY

I have no problem with redheads.  
I do, however, have a problem with  
Ms. Auzet. Her office is a magnet  
for shady people.

MAX

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

FANNY

(nodding)

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

From far off, we hear the RUMBLE of thunder.

MAX

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

FANNY

It's lasagna.

INT. BASTIDE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Christie is feeling much better. She pulls the cork from  
a bottle of 2000, the unlabeled wine.

CHRISTIE

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

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

CHARLIE

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

He tilts the glass to observe it's color.

CHARLIE

Magnificent hues of brick red,  
indicating a mature Burgundy.

CHRISTIE

It's a Bordeaux.

CHARLIE

Oh. Next, the retro-nasal  
cavity...

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

CHARLIE

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

CHRISTIE

It's coming out of your ears,  
Charlie.

CHARLIE

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

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

CHARLIE

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

Christie sips. Sips again. Something comes to her.

CHRISTIE

Tastes so familiar.

CHARLIE

Well you have had it before.

CHRISTIE

No, like...

Christie jumps up, inspired.

CHRISTIE

We have to go to the vineyard!

EXT. LOURMARIN - NIGHT

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

EXT. CHATEAU - COURTYARD - NIGHT

A PIANIST in a tuxedo plays a magnificent rendition of Chopin's "Prelude to a Raindrop." Nature complies with art, and it begins to rain. This is no ordinary rain, though. In seconds, it's a torrential assault from the heavens. People quickly scatter to find shelter in the chateau...or in their nearby cars.

INT. MAX'S CAR - NIGHT

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

MAX

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

FANNY

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

MAX

I offered him a settlement.

FANNY

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

MAX

The only thing I ever really loved was my Uncle...

(melancholy)

What an idiot I was. A treasure trove of wisdom...derived from a life of simple pleasures. And I couldn't even find the time to send the old bugger a postcard.

Silence.

FANNY

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

MAX

Yeah? Well I would very much like to recount it for you...

(beat)

(MORE)

MAX (CONT'D)

It starts where all my great  
memories start: *Le Griffon*...

EXT. LE GRIFFON - POOL - DUSK - FLASHBACK

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

UNCLE HENRY

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

Uncle Henry smiles lasciviously at MS. CHENAL, 40's,  
who pushes FANNY, 12, forward to meet Max. Even at  
this age, she's gorgeous and a bit dangerous. Max  
turns red with typical adolescent embarrassment.

YOUNG MAX

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

UNCLE HENRY

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

(to Mother)

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

Uncle Henry puts his hand on Ms. Chenal's ass, and they  
shuffle off...leaving Max alone with Fanny...

FANNY

*Je m'apelle Fanny. Et toi?*

Max can barely answer, his face crimson with discomfort.

YOUNG MAX

*Je...m'apelle...uhhh...Max.*

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

MAX (O.S.)

...and then...after you kissed  
me...you said...you said...?

INT. MAX'S CAR - SAME - PRESENT

MAX

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

FANNY

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

Fanny leans in. Kisses Max.

MAX

Oh, it's a deeper memory than that.

INT. ROUSSEL'S COTTAGE - LATER

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

MADAME ROUSSEL

*Claude! There are lights!*

Roussel jumps up, peeks out the window--

ROUSSEL'S POV - THROUGH WINDOW

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

EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - MINUTES LATER

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

CHRISTIE

Notice anything?

CHARLIE

(frightened)

Perhaps we should wait for the typhoon to pass!

CHRISTIE

It hasn't fallen off. It's been clipped off. See the diagonal cut on the stem?

(points down the row of vines)

And look -- there too.

(MORE)



CHRISTIE (CONT'D)

I'll bet it's the same through  
this whole patch.

CHARLIE

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

CHRISTIE

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

CHARLIE

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

CHRISTIE

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

CHARLIE

Unless he's making a completely  
different wine here?

They can HEAR the sound of BARKING.

CHRISTIE

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

CHARLIE

Then why do they sound like  
they're...

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

CHRISTIE

Oh shit. Run Charlie! Run!

Charlie and Christie take off!

INT. BASTIDE - ENTRYWAY - SAME

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

MAX

Wait-- Before we do this--

FANNY

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

MAX

No, no -- I'm not married.

(then)

I just need to know...

(beat)

Did you sleep with my Uncle?

FANNY

If I did, you would turn me away?

MAX

I'd have to.

Beat.

FANNY

No. I did not sleep with *Henri*.

Relieved, Max returns to ravaging her.

FANNY

But of course I tried.

EXT. VINEYARD - SAME

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

INT. BASTIDE - ENTRYWAY - MINUTES LATER

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

CHARLIE

Well, I for one, have newfound respect for rabbits.

CHRISTIE

We have to tell Max about the wine.

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

CHARLIE

I propose we wait 'til morning.

Christie picks up Fanny's lacy bra.

CHRISTIE

Agreed.

CUT TO:

EXT. LE GRIFFON - MORNING - ESTABLISHING

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

CHARLIE (O.S.)

FOR THE LOVE OF GOD! SCORPIONS!

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

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

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

FANNY

French toast?

MAX

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

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

MAX

What is it?

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Max, Fanny, Christie and Charlie all hash it out.

MAX

Garage wine?

CHARLIE

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

CHRISTIE

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

FANNY

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

CHARLIE

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

CHRISTIE

It's called *Le Coin Perdu*.

MAX

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

Christie nods.

CHARLIE

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

MAX

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

CHRISTIE

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

MAX

The 2000?

She produces an empty 2000 bottle.

CHRISTIE

This is *Le Coin Perdu*! Roussel's making it here.

MAX

Here? Where?

CHRISTIE

I discovered a small hectare, hidden past the trees.

FANNY

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

CHRISTIE

That's why he's passing it off as ~~our Max's~~ a Bordeaux. Bottling it that way. Labeling it that way. Selling it that way...

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

CHRISTIE

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

FANNY

(reading)  
*Appellation Bordeaux Controlle.*

MAX

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

(then)

Still, it'd be great to have an expert take a look.

There's a KNOCK at the side door.

VOICE (O.S.)

*Allo?*

All turn and see an ELEGANT MAN standing at the door. He has a quaffed grey goatee and wears a silk ascot and blue blazer with gold buttons.

MAX  
Sorry, sir, cave's closed.

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

MAX  
The oenologue!

EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - DAY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jean-Marie laughs.

JEAN-MARIE

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

(looks at his watch)

I must be going...the drive to  
Cassis will take over an hour.

(then)

If it is acceptable, I will have  
my office fax the preliminary  
report to Ms. Auzet's office this  
afternoon...

MAX

That'll be fine, thank you.

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

CHRISTIE

Okay, so I have an over-active  
imagination.

(then)

What is it Charlie, you look pale?

CHARLIE

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

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

MAX

Hello?

(listens)

We'll be there in ten minutes.

INT. AUZET'S OFFICE - LATER

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

AUZET

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

Christie lowers her head. Max should feel happy, but he  
doesn't.

## AUZET

Naturally, if further evidence should be uncovered, the judge would be more than happy to review the case... Barring that -- and provided you pay the fines -- you are free to sell the house, Mr. Skinner. And I'm afraid that means Ms. Roberts must now vacate the premises...

INT. MAX'S CAR - MOVING

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

CHRISTIE

I'll pack when I get back.

MAX

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

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

MAX

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

CHRISTIE

Really?

Max nods.

CHRISTIE

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

MAX

Charlie's gay.

Christie's jaw drops.

MAX

Just kidding.

They both burst into laughter.



INT. BASTIDE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Fanny pulls a crispy Barbary duck from the oven.

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT

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

CHARLIE

It's the only wine you can hear.

CHRISTIE

The music of the grape.

Max raises his glass:

MAX

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

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

MAX

Okay. Let's eat.

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

INT. CAVE - LATE NIGHT

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

CHRISTIE

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

CHARLIE

I believe I have Pinot envy.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

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

MAX

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

Fanny grins, but her grin hides her sadness.

MAX

Look, this is not goodbye, okay? We're only a few hours away from each other.

(he dips her)

Of course, nothing's preventing us from airlifting your cafe to Kensington. God knows London could use a decent bistro.

FANNY

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

MAX

Why didn't that sound so good?

FANNY

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

MAX

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

Beat.

MAX

Come back with me, Fanny.

FANNY

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

MAX

We've been through this... Provence...Lourmarin...this place; it just doesn't fit my life.

FANNY

No Max, it is your life that  
doesn't fit this place. And as  
long as it doesn't...how can your  
life ever fit with mine?

They continue dancing, the romantic mood spoiled.

EXT. TENNIS COURT - MORNING

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

CHARLIE

Max, your pool is disgustingly  
idyllic...

(sits down)

Where's the diving board, though?

(beat)

Well...here's the final draft.

He plops the contract on Max's lap.

MAX

How'd we do?

CHARLIE

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

Beat.

MAX

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

CHARLIE

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

MAX

(sad irony)

Leave it to Uncle Henry to turn  
his inheritance into a lesson in  
self-examination... And what am  
I gonna do with his last bit of  
wisdom? What else? Sell it off  
to the highest bidder...then pat  
myself on the back for winning  
again.

CHARLIE

Max, it isn't too late to pull out. Why not keep the place as a vacation hideaway?

MAX

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

CHARLIE

What?

MAX

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

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

MAX

"There's nowhere else in the world where you can keep busy doing so little and enjoy it so much..."

Without even looking at it, Max signs the contract.

MAX

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

CHARLIE

Of course.

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

EXT. VINEYARD - SAME

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

ROUSSEL

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

WE ARE NOW IN A FLASHBACK. YOUNG MAX HIDES BEHIND THE VINES...AND WATCHES A MUCH YOUNGER ROUSSEL SING THE SAME SONG TO HIS GRAPES. UNCLE HENRY KNEELS NEXT TO MAX.

YOUNG MAX

Why does he sing to them, Uncle Henry?

UNCLE HENRY

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

YOUNG MAX

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

UNCLE HENRY

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

MAX

Truth?

UNCLE HENRY

So you have been listening to me all summer?

YOUNG MAX

(kindly)

It's hard not to, you're always talking.

UNCLE HENRY

(smiles back)

Cheeky little sod... Follow me...

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

HENRY

Actually, I was thinking of balance, Max.

(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)

Balance in wine, it seems to me,  
is as elusive as balance in  
life... It requires a heart that  
can listen...notice, Max, the  
first four letters of heart are  
h-e-a-r. It also demands a mind  
that can accept paradox and  
contradiction, without abdicating  
the mathematical perfection of the  
universe... Take note Max: since a  
balanced wine can only be produced  
by a balanced vine -- it stands to  
reason that a balanced life can  
only be produced by a balanced  
man. It is therefore your charge,  
boy, to find that what brings  
harmony to your *terroir*, take hold  
of it, and never...ever...let her  
go...

Uncle Henry is now staring right at Older Max now.

MAX

Her?

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

INT. AIRPLANE - FIRST CLASS - IN FLIGHT - EVENING

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

EXT. MAX'S BUILDING - NIGHT

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

INT. MAX'S BUILDING - LOBBY - SAME

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

BERT

Welcome back, Mr. Skinner.

MAX

Brought you a souvenir, Bert.

Max hands him a bottle of the unlabeled, 2000, wine.

BERT

Thanks very much, sir.  
 (the elevator doors  
 shut)  
 Probably bought it in duty free.

He tosses it into the trash.

INT. MAX'S APARTMENT - LATER

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

INT. MAX'S BEDROOM - SAME

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

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

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. LE GRIFFON - VINEYARD - MORNING

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

INT. LAWTON BROTHERS - MORNING

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

GEMMA

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

MAX

(looks up)  
 I'm fine, Gemma. Just a little jetlagged.

GEMMA

Yeah, that one hour time change is a real killer.

VOICE (O.S.)

You set me up, you wanker!

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

MAX

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

KENNY

It was your short order that got me fired!

MAX

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

KENNY

You called my mobile!

MAX

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

Big laughs all around.

GEMMA

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

MAX

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

The Security Guards wrestle Kenny out of the office.

GEMMA

How'd you do it, Max?

MAX

I knew that Kenny wanted my job. I also knew that Amis desperately wanted his money back. All I did was play matchmaker.



GEMMA

So you win again?

MAX

Oh, I don't know...

He glances at the screensaver, melancholy.

MAX

It seems to me that, sometimes,  
when you win, you really lose.

(beat)

Come on...let's get to work...

INT. FSA BUILDING - OUTSIDE BOARDROOM - MINUTES LATER

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

MAX

Look at that one: he looks like  
Spike Milligan.

Gemma's cellphone rings.

GEMMA

Hello? Speaking...

(listens)

You're absolutely sure? Very  
well, thank you anyway.

(she hangs up)

That's odd.

MAX

What the matter?

GEMMA

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

MAX

And...?

GEMMA

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

MAX

Jean-Marie Bruiner?

GEMMA

Never even heard of the bloke.

A SECRETARY enters--

SECRETARY

Mr. Skinner, the Commission is ready for you.

Max has an epiphany.

MAX

*MERDE!*

To Gemma's amazement, Max dashes off.

GEMMA

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

EXT. FRANCE - FREEWAY ~~ed~~ SPEEDING ~~to~~ DAY

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

EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - DAY

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

MAX (O.S.)

The godforsaken spot.

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

MAX

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

ROUSSEL

I do not understand--?

MAX

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

Roussel rises, peels off his gloves. The jig is up, and he knows it...

ROUSSEL

Mr. Max...I have worked here at *Le Griffon* for thirty-three years...ever since your Uncle bought the house. Many times I asked him to replace the vines, which were old and tired before he arrived, but for one reason or another, it was never the right time for him...

EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - YEARS EARLIER

ROUSSEL (O.S.)

There was one parcel which I knew could produce good wine... It had the right stony soil, the right exposure, the right *terroir*.

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

EXT. LIMESTONE HECATRE - YEARS EARLIER

ROUSSEL

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

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

EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - PRESENT

ROUSSEL

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

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S STUDY - YEARS EARLIER

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

INT. UNCLE HENRY'S BEDROOM - YEARS EARLIER

Madame Roussel tends to Uncle Henry, who's in bed, ashen.

ROUSSEL (O.S.)

But then he became ill...and while it was not quite honest...I had paid for everything, I had done all the work; I wasn't stealing. It seemed fair...

INT. CAVE - YEARS EARLIER

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

ROUSSEL

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

INT. MAITRE AUZET'S OFFICE - YEARS EARLIER

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

ROUSSEL

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

EXT. LIMESTONE HECTARE - PRESENT

MAX

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

ROUSSEL

(nodding)

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

MAX

(betrayed)

So all along...she's been protecting her own interests?

ROUSSEL

(eyes glimmering)

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

MAX

It's quite an achievement.

ROUSSEL

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

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

MAX

(heavy-hearted)

I sold it, Roussel.

ROUSSEL

*Quoi?*

MAX

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

ROUSSEL

AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!

Roussel charges Max and tackles him to the soil. Roussel may be old, but he's robust, and heavyset. He smothers Max beneath him, cursing him in French... Tati moves in too...and starts savaging Max's ankle.

Max knees poor Roussel in the nuts. Roussel crumples to the ground. He's a beaten man, tears streaming down his face. Both out of breath, Max and Roussel stare at each other -- the peasant and the bond trader, covered in soil...not so different after all...

ROUSSEL

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

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

EXT. VINEYARD - MINUTES LATER

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

MAX

Charlie! Cancel the sale! Cancel  
the sale!

EXT. BASTIDE - SECONDS LATER

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

CHARLIE

Max, what the devil are you doing  
here?

MAX

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

CHRISTIE

I knew it!

CHARLIE

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

MAX

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

Just then, a shiny new Mercedes pulls into the driveway.

CHARLIE

Must be the new owner now.

The car pulls to a stop. Engine off...

And who climbs out of the car?

Maitre Auzet.

AUZET

(to Charlie)

Mr. Willis? Delighted to meet you.

CHRISTIE

You sent the phony oenologue...?

MAX

To lower the price for yourself.

AUZET

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

Auzet heads into the *bastide*--

CHRISTIE

Charlie, do something.

CHARLIE

I can't, luv. She's the legal owner.

MAX

No she isn't.

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

MAX

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

CHRISTIE

You what?

Auzet looks concerned.

MAX

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

CHRISTIE

(crushed)

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

MAX

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

(beat)

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

Beat.

CHARLIE

(to Auzet)

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

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

CHARLIE

...void.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

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



FANNY'S POV - UPCOMING ROAD

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

It's a car seat.

BACK TO SCENE

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

MAX (O.S.)

Can you believe it? Must have fallen off the back of a truck or something...?

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

FANNY

*Mais tu ete fou.* (You're crazy.)

MAX

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

FANNY

This is prudent advice.

MAX

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

He takes Fanny into his arms.

MAX

Oh my God.

FANNY

What is it?

MAX

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

FANNY

*Oui?*

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

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

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

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

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

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LE GRIFFON - A FEW WEEKS LATER

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

EXT. VINEYARD - SAME

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

EXT. TENNIS COURT - SAME

Fanny and Christie play a heated game of tennis.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

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

MADAME ROUSSEL  
*Crespeou et salade.*

CHARLIE

*Enchanto, enchanto. Merci.*

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

CHARLIE

Any idea what *crespeou* is?

MAX

Cow brains omelette.

Charlie spits his food.

MAX

Just kidding.

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

CHARLIE

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

MAX

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

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

CHARLIE

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

MAX

You takin' odds on that?

Max swirls his wine. Sniffs.

CHARLIE

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

Max takes a sip...starts trilling.

CHARLIE

And then, after months of eating, drinking, sleeping, and bonking, what have you got to look forward to? A state-mandated four week vacation.

Max swallows.

MAX

Mmmm. More fruity than nutty...

CHARLIE

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

MAX

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

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

CHARLIE

1987?

He takes a sip. Trills. Swallows.

CHARLIE

Mmmm. A good year.

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

MAX

We'll see.

The Talking Heads song "Heaven" fades in...

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

*Heaven...heaven is a place...*

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

FIN