

## **PRESENTATION**

As part of the France Culture Festival in Nimes in July 2007. Written texts and said by filmmakers.

Here Claire Simon tries out the form invented by the Lumière Brothers, the plan of 50 seconds, in written form, a moment seen, transcribed.

## **ALBA**

He's very handsome and rather sporty, but quite relaxed. He's American: a great filmmaker and a great photographer. All round great, you might say: young, modern, and driven. He might be 79 but he looks 55, kind of like an old teenager. I watch him; he's a bit out of it and frankly disappointed with life. No one lets him work, lets him make films. They think he is from the 70s, but he manages to get by. He's touched that people still admire him, but he couldn't care less. It's almost irrelevant. A very beautiful young actress makes up to him, which is fine. It's normal. They're sitting in a cinema at a festival. The critic who promoted him in Europe is showing one of his old films, calling it "very modern and brilliant". The actress whispers translations of what the critic is saying in his ear. She's overwhelmed with fear, emotion, and pleasure. She thinks she's in a fairy tale, sitting alongside an American giant, a giant who looks like a lost young man. Unfortunately, the film is subtitled in English; so, no need to translate or nuzzle his neck anymore. They are shoulder to shoulder in the dark. The images are in black and white. It's an early sound film. Noises welling up from eternity, barely recognizable. Secretaries pounding away on typewriters. The actress holds her breath, carried away by the film, just sitting next to the great filmmaker. The screen is a canvas for her crystallization, each image from the past shapes her love for him, her desire to please him. She shivers like the diaphragm of a speaker, moved by the barely recognizable sound of the old recordings. And he might tremble, too. She is so beautiful, so young! But he's silent. He nods off and then suddenly he's asleep. He doesn't tell himself stories anymore.

## **Italian border**

I find her fascinating. I can no longer concentrate, reading or writing. I'm gripped by her blue eyes and her hand-knit jumper, probably made by her. She's got an accent from Val d'Aosta, rolling her Italian into French, so I hear each syllable, each word. She talks about her sister, who's no longer nice, her dog, etc.

She has the fine, elegant face of a little old lady, gentle but determined. Her sparkly blue eyes give her a funny look. Her slender old body fascinates me, slim and happy, at ease and full of life. She might be 80 years old, but she talks and moves as if she were 30. Absolutely everything's under control. She went to get some food; she bought some wine that she shared with her pals. She's from a country where people drink wine at lunchtime. And that's it. She loves to chat; she remembers a lot and can't wait to tell you, with real humour. For example, beautiful old cars that were masterpieces - 'capolavori'. She's very sophisticated but she's quite offhand. Perhaps it's her insouciance I find so attractive, her theatricality, her accent, with all the comic gestures of an old lady? She reminds me of someone, but I can't think who; a young girl in an old lady's body, drinking wine at midday, even on a train.

## **ANGOULÊME**

He turns to me, whispering: "How long does the mass last?" He's all sweaty, but not yet 30 years old. He looks like Dominique Besnehard. It's 9am here in Angouleme cathedral. A regular old girl stops in the central pews to have a quiet chat with a man on his knees. He asks me again: "How long does the mass last? How long?". Like a movie, or a sex scene, I've no idea, maybe three quarters of an hour. There won't be another mass in the cathedral this morning,

for sure. But he doesn't get it. He's got to decide, so he needs to know how long it'll last. He's preoccupied, quivering, fidgeting. If only he'd known how long it would last! Everything's up in the air, frozen. He's still looking at me. He might be mad at me for giving him a rough answer, but he's out of time. And he's on the run. Everything's going too fast, but he's rooted to the spot, overexcited, and stuck at the back of the cathedral. But at least no one will come looking for him here.

## **Le Cannet**

A bakery/coffee shop for teenagers. I sit down and I listen. They're smoking like crazy, and they're 14-15 years old, completely overwhelmed by the tragedy of what needs to be done, accepted, saved, repaired . . .

- \_\_ The little girl doesn't speak, she just eats!
- \_\_ She doesn't speak! But she's put on 12 kgs!
- \_\_ She needs psychological counselling.
- \_\_ Emilie .... Yeah, she needs help daily.
- \_\_ The shrink says there's no alternative.
- \_\_ Marie the little girl. . . She drew a picture of her mum with hearts all around it and stars too.
- \_\_ We can talk, we're not in the situation.
- \_\_ I'm not a feminist but he comes home very late, he's never there...
- \_\_ Aren't they supposed to be together?
- \_\_ Er, yes, but the father is with Chantal.
- \_\_ It's been seven years...
- \_\_ But no... She doesn't know... He couldn't tell her because she'd just found out she was ill.
- \_\_ It would be really something if their relationship withstood all that!
- \_\_ Yeah, she's a good woman!
- \_\_ Marie's too young to understand!
- \_\_ Her mother doesn't talk about it anymore...At all!
- \_\_ Can't she speak any more?
- \_\_ No!
- \_\_ For real?
- \_\_ In the evening all she says is "How was your day, girls?" And that's it.
- \_\_ Yeah...You don't know about cancer...
- \_\_ For example, you've got cancer, and you don't know it!
- \_\_ You're supposed to do a mammogram every two years. It's an obligation. It's too serious!
- \_\_ You're right! But it can be treated... I tell myself that with my small breasts, I can afford to be less afraid . . .
- \_\_ She came in after the "Temps forts" weekend. She was crying because her mother had died, and I thought she was crying about something else! I asked her what was wrong, and her mother was dead! DEAD...

## **Barcelona**

I can't hear him. he's talking but he's looking away. He leans in, but then slips away, worried there might be competition for his attention. Is the person he's talking to good enough? Then there's his glasses, his monastic pate. Plus, he's short, but that doesn't change anything. His

eyes are panicky. He's going to get contaminated; it's certainly possible. If only we could then see him being dragged down like that, by an old guy who gets him going again, gets him talking, forces him to go ever deeper, finally compelling him to do something he doesn't want to do. He gets driven on and on to the end, almost becoming a couple, fooled by the bald little oldster, for whom it all seemed to be over.

The man had already sunk but couldn't admit it. Deep down he wants us to sink with him, he wants EVERYTHING to sink with him. He knows the end is near, but at least it's his end!

The doors are about to close, watch out! You've got to run! GET OUT! Some manage to escape... the ones who always escape, who never queue up, who succeed...

They're over there! Over there! Where there's some air! Somewhere over the rainbow! Far away from that chap who wants to talk business, who thinks he's got what it takes, that he's got the clout, that he knows his stuff, that he knows the music, and who blocks off the exits... OK, he's an old has been. So, don't let him speak or dominate the conversation by keeping on talking.

There's nothing for it but to escape, to find a way out ... The rest of them are stuck here, queuing to get on the plane, to get back to Paris.

Tonight, there should be peace and quiet. No more suits, no competition! But tomorrow? Back to failure? Getting away is always so incredibly tough. It's always the thing that weighs you down, that pulls you down when you least expect it.

On the plane, he's standing right in front of me, hoisting his bag into the overhead. The stewardess is worried that it's too big. But it's empty! As I told you! Empty! He lifts it up, and indeed it's as light as a cardboard suitcase . . .

## **SAINT MANDE 1**

She's got a camel coat, and a camel coloured dog that she's holding in her arms. She's protecting it from any harm that might befall. Someone might steal it or snatch it away from her. The world is a wicked place, not like before. Everything's going too fast, and things are getting worse. But it could come back if that's not impossible. At least the dog won't grow up.

## **SAINT MANDE 2**

\_\_ I just heard from my grandson!  
\_\_ Truth is, that's all I'm waiting for!! Friends tell me about it!  
\_\_ Doesn't being a grandfather bother you? sleeping with a grandmother!  
\_\_ I rented in Israel ...  
\_\_ My daughter's wedding . . .  
\_\_ Mazeltov !  
\_\_ The little one! You can't imagine!  
\_\_ I thought you were going to take out a bundle!

\_\_ 10,000€! Went to Rue de Rivoli to get it! I'll give you 500 if you come with me! Come on!  
\_\_ Yesterday I stayed at home! I'm playing everything! I play everything!  
\_\_ 20 winners in Portugal!  
\_\_ I played like this...  
\_\_ Did you tell him to speak to me quietly?  
\_\_ I told him to read out the winners slowly!  
\_\_ I've been looking for a week to go to Corsica...  
\_\_ Only fish Shabbat...  
\_\_ There's no grocery shop, no butcher shop, no synagogue!  
\_\_ I've already been to Corsica, 3 or 4 times, but there's nothing there!  
\_\_ In Agadir there can't be more than 12 or 15 people left, that's all!  
\_\_ The guy has five children, he wants to go to Israel, but he can't, it's too expensive!  
\_\_ My sister went for a week :650€

### **BEAUBOURG**

He was talking loudly. He said they'd been forced to flee and that's how they lived . . . in hiding in every country. The kid listening to him is chubby, with a cartoonish haircut slicked down with brilliantine. He looks up at the speaker, who is getting louder and louder:

“Then there was the Second World War, and they were all killed, almost all of them, 6 million. Those who escaped returned to where they had come from, their homeland, their country, the place from which they'd been expelled.”

I can't hear what the child is saying, but he's resisting the voice. Yes, the Palestinians said it was their home, and so did the Jews. They were both right. 6 million, you understand! That's more than all the Israelis. That's more than the Muslims here in France. There are three or four million of them here. The child is Arab, he doesn't agree, the Palestinians are right, that's all, otherwise he'll be in trouble. He knows that he's the one who's going to end up being expelled. 6 million, the speaker repeats it even louder. Here he goes again: “That's more than all the Muslims in France! There are 3 million...” He doesn't say "you are", rather he says: “There are more or less 4 million people”. Suddenly, he shouts to another child: "Bring me your notebook! Just try another game! Hitting is not a game! His voice is endlessly forced to turn his irritation into anger, into authority, he wants the children to accept, to bend, to understand, to agree. It's not funny, it's serious. He's beside himself, but he's only using his voice, which is angry, threatening.... The parity of the Holocaust! What!!!! He doesn't say it, but he makes it felt; he is powerless in the face of the unresponsive child, who may be thinking, who may be afraid of anger, trying to sweep it away with a partisan, racial explanation. The young teacher, totally pissed off, doesn't get it; he gets up and takes the kids back to school. Suddenly, Niki de St Phalle's water machines take over as works of art; the pool remains calm, the illusion of a swimming pool, holidays, summer, a larger, freer world in a public square.

### **BOIS DE VINCENNES**

He's a bit sculptural, like a Mapplethorpe, but clothed. Dark, beautiful movements. He's been on his phone for a long time, staring at the screen, glasses pushed up on his forehead. He's such a handsome hunk that his outsized jogging pants and broken flip-flops offer an almost necessary counterpoint. There are others on the playing field.

\_\_ Oh! My mum didn't deserve to win these faggots!

An out of breath runner comes up to him. He stays in the shade of a tree, holding the players' water bottle. He's black. His silence and his impassivity are echoed by his stuff: the phone, the watch, the keys, the pack of Marlboros. He puts on his dark glasses; hands in pockets he watches the players. Silence. I can't get over his stillness, his lack of reaction. What's he thinking about? What's he doing at the edge of the field. His silence is magnificent. He has the posture of a master. So, what's with the silence, the impassivity? Is it just a pose, to intimidate? To stay composed? He's just there, not doing a damned thing. I cannot stop staring at this man, still silent, hunting for his incomprehensible secret, the underlying basis of his Majesty.

### **ILE DE LA CITE**

\_\_ That one yesterday, he got 15 years!

\_\_ Oh yes, the Arab; he killed someone.

\_\_ Policeman. It was a knife, I think.

\_\_ Was he up before Maitre what's-his-name?

\_\_ The one who did the Outreau business . . .

\_\_ He's got a Mercedes with a 13 number-plate, even though he lives in Paris. He's also got a house in Clermont-Ferrand.

\_\_ Yesterday there was this bloke, a Pole who passed himself off as a cop, with false ID, ripping off tourists.

\_\_ He got off . . .

\_\_ Yeah, the judge is friendly, if you smile at her.

They're behind me. I can hear them, but I can't see them.

Everyone's drinking coffee from the machine; the session is suspended. Waiting for the judgements. The space is impressive; the light and the architecture let you know you're at the heart of a public institution, a materialisation of the theatre of judgement, a judgement that you either shun or embrace. The word Majesty certainly suits the setting, defining the walls and the stairways. I realise that I can't wait to photograph and to film them. Everything here has symbolic significance, and that's magnificent. But it's all a bit too straightforward, as if all you have to do is be here to uncover the essence of life. Then I remember that it might be just the physical backdrop for an unfolding nightmare that could go on for ever.

Two men, one out of breath and sitting down, the other younger and fidgety, standing next to him. They're chatting like bookies. They're behind me, but I can't really turn around to look at them.

\_\_ The president of the court is OK, he's a good judge. He's here on Tuesdays and Mondays. Silence.

I, too, had noticed that the judge was quick to smile, ready to find the funny side of things. A young Chinese girl was accused of lying to the Chinese authorities. Here, in the court, she was helped by an interpreter who said, "She says she doesn't understand Mandarin." "So, what are you talking to her in?" "In Mandarin, your honour." She's working in a fashion workroom, but her child is in China with her husband, who she says is a member of the Chinese Mafia and wants to kill her. She acknowledges each phrase read out to her with a nod of the head, but replaces it with a furious NO as soon as she realises she's being sent back to China.

\_\_ The judge eats at the Chinese restaurant.

\_\_ You can eat pretty well for 5€ at the Chinese!

\_\_ Plus, that's where you'll see all the magistrates.  
\_\_ And that fat one? He's a Corsican.  
\_\_ He must weigh about 120kilos!  
\_\_ I knew one from Alsace who weighed 145kilos!

They make themselves dizzy trying to set all sorts of records, so there's some sort of basis for the exquisite triumphs they'll never share.

\_\_ It's pretty cold out, really horrid.  
\_\_ I got here at 9 past three.  
\_\_ Are you fed up?  
\_\_ No!  
\_\_ Later, I'll go back on the 23 bus.  
\_\_ There's nobody there . . . they've all gone to watch the match . . .  
\_\_ The best part is that Court 15 does all the divorces, the family stuff, it's pretty hot.  
\_\_ What's going on there at the moment?  
\_\_ I dunno.  
\_\_ Are they going to get going?  
\_\_ Yeah, they're on a break at the moment, but maybe soon.

All at once the man's voice sounded like an alcoholic's, skidding around out of control. Yes, he heard me. Yes, he lives in his car. Yes, he goes from town to town. No, he hasn't got a licence, but he doesn't drink that much. Sure, he ran away from home, but he never knew his parents, not the real ones.

\_\_ Have you ever been raped?  
\_\_ Never. Are you crazy!!!  
\_\_ Do you know Madame Machin?  
\_\_ Does she give you the time of day?  
\_\_ Apparently, she refuses to retire . . .  
\_\_ I heard that she works for nothing.  
\_\_ No, she must be saving for her retirement . . .  
\_\_ Hardly, she's at least 68 . . . 70 . . . maybe even 75.

They are on the edge of a life that's slipping away, they're drifting, as if the earth were letting go of them, and life was vanishing, but still they hang on. And they stay in touch. Me too. They're interested in everyone, they check them out, but things slide, and in the end it's always themselves that they are hunting for, that they pick out under other traits. I probably do the same thing, and it horrifies me.

### **SAINT MANDÉ 3**

He's holding the receiver. He's a fat man, but he hangs up daintily, brushing dust off the handset. He says his shorts are made in England and are good quality. He can't remember how much he paid. He's trying to sit quietly, with legs crossed, all his energy focused on passing the phone from one hand to the other. From time to time, he checks texts. It's a bit like a prayer, waiting for something, getting a glimpse . . . Who knows?

What a boon for submissive men, to hold in their hands a way to stay in touch with their imagined mistresses. The women opposite have huge dark glasses covering their faces, pretending not to see anything. It's a habit. I keep telling myself that this is the only real reason for mobile phones; the enablers of adultery, inevitable, virtual.

\_\_ Is it hidden? No?

\_\_ So, how are you going to cope?

## **BELLEVILLE**

They're shoulder-to-shoulder, leaning on the Métro balustrade, turning this non-place into a hangout for men, a meeting spot, as the station plans say.

Bang in the middle of the boulevard de Belleville, there they are with their silvery hair, still handsome, chatting away. This is where they hang out, quietly watching the world go by, without their wives. They take in everything: the pavement opposite, the cars, the motorbikes, the passersby. It's like looking at boats in a port, or the sea or a landscape. They examine everything around them, expecting nothing, yet hoping for everything. There they are, chatting and listening, scanning everything, but not moving. They're stuck there. Time is slipping further and further away, faster and faster, until they can no longer tell what's happening.

Beyond the traffic noise, I imagine family conversations, talking about work or money, just floating around, a legato rhythm that stops us from going home. It's one phrase after another, sometimes a long time after, that keeps the conversation going.

Without moving they give a running commentary on people passing; sad, funny, disparaging. They don't move, but there they are, full in the sun. That's how they get noticed, and not forgotten. They're immigrants but they're not alone. They're held together in a sort of brotherhood of friendship, rivalry . . . They could still hit on a girl, or do a bit of business . . . They keep an eye on what the youngsters are up to. They're part of society, and had they not been mistreated foreigners they'd be in charge. They're old enough, and they know how. They're men.

## **BOULEVARD SOULT/ July**

I move about, I'm walking, and I spot him in the distance. It's a bright summer's morning, full of promise. Then I see him, tall and classy, waiting on a side street, with his silver hair. He's got a lot on, an overcoat and a jacket, it's all too much. I take him for a bum. I get closer. He's got a big suitcase and a smaller one as well, waiting, perhaps for a taxi. He's got quite a physical presence. What made me think he's a bum? Because he's got so many layers on? What of it? He's a very old guy, he's worried, and his layers comfort him, console him. When you're old you become fragile, you wrap yourself up when you have no one to look after you . . . Or when there's no one there . . . Someone you will miss, or who's already missing. She must be upstairs, she couldn't come down to see him off, or she's already gone on holiday and he's going to join her. He waits for the taxi, all covered up. He's vulnerable, and that overcoat and jacket cosset him and take care of him. His self-respect, damaged over the years, is protected, wrapped in the warmth of his layers. I get near to him. The suitcases. The big one and the little one. I'm behind him. He's looking left and right along Boulevard Sout. Nothing. Motionless. Then a scream; he screams. Raucous, huge, like a monster. A bear-wolf from a Hollywood film. He's

got a werewolf in his trunk; at least he's got that. He goes on screaming as passing cars downshift, or as lorries accelerate or sigh with their airbrakes. He screams to the right, to the left, to the sky. It frightens me, and I steer clear. He'll scream at me if he catches my eye. But he can't see me, I'm too near, and yet too far away. He's screaming at God, he screams at the street noise, the symphony of horns. He's the old lion warning the whole savannah that he's still here. Bambi is scared, and so are the wildebeest. The suitcase won't shut properly, it's coming unstitched. He picks it up and slings his other bag, also in bad shape, over his shoulder. He storms off. I find his indignity somewhat dignified, handsome, and furious. I'm romanticizing him. But he can't reach me with his anger. I'm out of range. Is it because he's a frazzled old man that I find him beautiful? Because he's still standing? Because it's nearly over? He's gone. He's having a fucking hard time. It's not over yet.

2'50

### **Quick PANTIN/ June**

Black hair pulled back, tied up, straightened. Hard, blue eyes.

Come down from there!

She is young, talking to her eldest daughter, and her voice is harsh. She's trying for maximum brutality.

There are boys up there, and music!

She is silent. Her silence presses on the back of the children's necks; they eat with heads down, like animals.

We're lucky to be at Quick. She's taken us there. We don't look up, we don't look at her. She's got a point. She knows things.

Now we can hear the music from upstairs. The mother listens, lets the rhythm enter her body, dances on her chair.

The beat animates her, slowly wakes her up. It finally gets into her, the music gives her back love, sex. Her real life. She's in transit here, it won't last, she's a different breed anyway. Her swing makes her a divinity you can't look at without burning your eyes.

Her children feed her, worry her. Irritation is her style, she sacrifices herself, they have to pay. Her boyfriend, the father, seems nice and unconcerned.

Well, now you're going to play.

After all, they're still a couple! She strokes her mobile, her nails done, a photo of herself on the screen, she's ready for love. Nothing comes. She's impatient. For everything. Time is always empty, always boring, she can't take it anymore. Nothing calms her down. Three children, one man, she's bored to death, dreaming of being loved even more, somewhere else, better. Insatiable.

### **PESARO BEACH/ June**

*In the Foreground:*

A very handsome man is playing a kind of paddle tennis with a friend about his own age, in his fifties, their feet in the water. The friend is handsome, but a bit soft. The one with his back to me has the look of a skier, a very elegant body, worn with style. His appearance suggests he'll be nice, smart, clever, even independent. A caption from a women's magazine. I'm ridiculous. I like this man and I can't tell if it's his light, untidy beard, the marine beauty of his face, the energy with which he plays, the elegance of his movements. Every time he misses the ball I see his face. He knows I'm looking at him without ever having met my eyes, and when he goes back to restart the game, very imperceptibly he's rolling. But only just. I laugh.



*Background:*

Behind the two men, further out to sea, two women, the same age or a little older. Old and therefore ugly. But I don't think they're bad looking. I've seen them in the courtyard. Courtesans standing in the water. The one on the right, with her arms resting on her hips, makes a lozenge shape that beautifully sets off her green two-piece swimming costume. Her blonde hair is up in a bun. I prefer her to the other one, whose old arms hang down a little, giving the diamond a rounded shape on the inside, while her flat green bottom forms a rectangle on the double trapezoid of her slightly grainy thighs. This woman is totally wrapped up in her story, her hands are beautifully expressive, a terrible story, full of twists and turns, with side stories, flashbacks and explanations, and her friend is stunned. What talent! Better than the cinema! She has seen the whole story, goes back over it, unfolds the scenes, the best ones, and takes the measure of it more deeply each time. They still resonate, unfolding, revealing secrets that no one, or everyone, would have thought of, but it was too simple. Yet, in fact it's not so simple.

*Distant background:*

In front of them, off in the distance, a child, a large little girl, swims. Then she stops and walks a little. She's on foot. Her eyes fixed on the sea, seeing into the depths. A universe. She is alone with the sea. She is a poet.

## **PESARO LUNGOMARE**

There are 4 or 5 of them, a gang. They move quickly along the *lungomare*. It's a time of day when everyone is walking around, showing off, looking at each other, saying hello. They convinced their parents, they waited, they barely ate. And now they're free at last. They are between eleven and twelve years old, but tonight they are men who want to live. They hurry along, and I follow them. They want to go so badly. They speed up. They are conquerors. They are attacking "Saturday night". The smallest is the darkest, navy blue, dark skinned. He's always in front. I rarely see his face; his eyes are slanted and impatient. Like his friends, he speaks nervous, dramatic, playful Italian. He's so excited that he wants to cut across the lawn, but the others don't, so he comes back in front of them. I imagine he's remembering that he's the son of a foreigner, and that it's not in his interest to allow himself to stray from the sacred lawn. Even more than the others he wants to be a young Roman, sure of his empire's superiority. Many immigrants have come here, but I don't see them among the walkers. Sri Lankans, Romanians, Ukrainians, Chinese, Africans. Maybe he's Sri Lankan. I'm trying to guess the origin that's bothering him this evening. He's a ragazzo, he's in a gang and he's out in front. I wonder where they're going so fast. Maybe I look like an old fart following them like this, but I don't care, I'm off, dazzled by their energy, curious to see them get somewhere. The merry-go-round? Oh no, not even a glance! Old women, old men, couples, young fathers, young mothers, aunts, the guys at the café in front of France Brazil. The young gang overtakes everyone. Always in a hurry. Lights, music, no... They don't go there, they turn towards the breakwater. They push past the few people leaning against the railings and go to the end of the breakwater. Two fishing rods are planted there. They have arrived. They surround the two fishermen. Here they are. And so begins their hopeful Saturday evening.

## HOTEL DES BAINS PESARO JULY

I could almost feel his weary sandals, the empty coffee cup on the bar. Walking slowly, he flopped down into an armchair further on, disillusioned. A waiter arrived, holding a tray full of clean cups. He put it on the sink and took one to make me a cappuccino.

He stood up, now alert, and went round to the work side of the bar. American accent. American language.

\_\_ You won last night! Bravo!

The waiter nodded, Italians are the strongest, that's for sure.

\_\_ Three nil, that was great!

The waiter knows it, he's Italian, we're the strongest, we know it, we're not going to make a fuss about it. He's a modest winner, he's the one working and the American is on holiday.

The American drags his sandals over to the reception desk, looking for a better welcome from the young woman in charge of the keys and the hotel switchboard.

\_\_ You won! It's great! Yesterday! The match!

She smiled.

\_\_ Next is Germany?

Yes.

\_\_ So "Forza Italia"!

The girl's smile stiffens a little.

His arms are tattooed, so maybe he'd like to be a real adventurer.

The girl says softly, with her Italian accent.

\_\_ You shouldn't say "Forza Italia", it's politics. You can say "Forza azzuri"... They stole "Forza Italia" ... You can't say that.

The American doesn't understand but he accepts. He doesn't know Berlusconi's slogan. Perhaps he vaguely sensed this young girl's total hatred for the Cavaliere, a feeling of horror just at the mention of it. He's just discovered this sport that everyone in Europe is crazy about, so he can't learn everything at once.

## SAINT MANDÉ 5

She's got pink star sunglasses, long brown hair and a pretty, low-cut dress. She's on the terrace in Saint Mandé. It's late on Sunday morning and everyone's there. Especially the men who come in and out of the off track betting, worried about the races some for lunch and some for the horses. They're having fun but they're jittery, worried by the slightest movement, never sure of anything.

She's sitting at a table with a girlfriend, also beautiful, who's eating a Popsicle. Two men are standing behind them, chatting. Suddenly they notice her. It's a father and a grandfather. The older one bends down to kiss her, and puts his hand on her breast. She laughs and covers herself. He moves away. She keeps her hand on her décolleté. She is overwhelmed by the presence of all the men around her; it's as if everyone could suddenly see her. She changes places, bats her eyelids, shudders, almost laughs. Her girlfriend has almost finished her ice cream. There are just the two of them at this table, which seems to be getting bigger and bigger, and more and more deserted, because they are so small.

A handsome man in dark glasses comes up behind her, telling her it's time to go home. He's carrying heavy grocery bags in each hand. He speaks in her ear, " We have to go home ", he's

in a hurry. He repeats almost mechanically. Come on! She ought to obey, as usual. Come on, let's go! He doesn't even think about what he's saying, he just wants to get her home. He looks away, still on the lookout. His eyes want to quickly pick up anything that might be happening, who's here, who's not here this morning, what's going on, oh well, not so much, come on, let's go! She doesn't react, she tenses up, tries to make him disappear by not moving. She doesn't look at him, so she doesn't see him, so he's not there. She's on the terrace on Sunday morning, and men are staring at her. It's what she's made for; she didn't know it, she's just discovered it, that's it, it's happened, just like that, she's there. And in the middle of it all, in the middle of her silent escape, there's this other person who insists. Her father. We go home. She holds on, but she's shrinking. She's 16. She thinks she's still 16, 14... He's still there. He's really not demanding, yet he still doesn't understand why she doesn't come. She ignores him. She stiffens, he doesn't believe it, he doesn't even want to pay attention. Come on! That's enough of that! He pretends to walk away. She runs away. He turns round, a little, not too much, I'm going home, you come straight away. No! She answered. No! 12 years goes by fast! She sees her life as a woman slipping away beyond the horizon. Her father leaving. He turns the corner of the terrace, goes out into the street. He doesn't look back. She looks at him. She is 8 years old, she gets up and follows him like an adulteress forced to return home.