

[screenwriter]  
can you hear me?

[main character]  
yes, yes, i can hear you, can you hear me?

[screenwriter]

yes! how are you?

[main character]

i'm good, i just finished reading the latest version of the script you sent me yesterday, sorry i read it a bit fast but i think i have all the elements in mind. we actually just arrived in marseille and the trip was a bit longer than planned... anyways, i thought it was funny since that new scene you sent me is also taking place in marseille.

[screenwriter]

yes, the opening scene. it takes place in marseille, that's where they met in real life.

[main character]

oh ok, so this is the opening scene?

[screenwriter]

yeah, maybe we can start here?

[main character]

yes, i just wanted to ask you before we start so i don't forget, would you also have some pictures to send me? so i can imagine her better, it really helps to build up the character, especially when i'm playing someone who existed in real life...

[screenwriter]

i have a lot of pictures of her i can send you, not so many from that specific time though... maybe one or two.

[main character]

do you have any pictures of the two of them together?

[screenwriter]

i only found a series of photos printed on slides from the year 1960, just before their wedding, when they moved in together in oran. i'll scan them and send them to you this afternoon.

[main character]

are these the pictures of their wedding?

[screenwriter]

no, no, it's a couple of days before i think. they are somewhere by the sea. or maybe it's more in the countryside. anyways, i think they just went for a walk outside of the city. they're posing next to a car one after the other and on some of the pictures she's posing with flowers in her hands that she had just picked because i can see them in the background... they're only four of five pictures.

[main character]

what type of flowers?

[screenwriter]

mimosas i think, they're bright yellow. or some kind of orange. wait, maybe not. it's hard to tell because the photos are a bit damaged, but let me check again. i think it's more like a small tree than flowers. yeah, it's that small tree that blossoms in the spring, i don't remember the name, but they're also in the

background, next to the car... anyways, should we  
move on to the text?

[main character]

yes! i really like the new version of the opening  
scene. i prefer it than the previous one to be honest.  
basically, she takes the boat from oran to marseille,  
then arrives in marseille and they meet immediately  
right?

[screenwriter]

no, they meet at the train station, because she goes to  
paris with her sister first, that's the reason of their trip  
to france, to meet her sister's fiancé in paris. and then  
they take the train back to marseille and they meet at  
the train station in marseille, the main station.

[main character]

the one where i was yesterday. is this really the way  
they met or did you just invent it?

[screenwriter]

it's true that they met in marseille, but i don't think  
it's because he proposed to carry her luggage. i'm not  
sure exactly how it happened, no one told me, or no  
one really ever talked about it. i just know it was there  
because of that letter he sent her a few days later in  
which he mentions it.

[main character]

so she returns to oran just a few days after they met?

[screenwriter]

yes, probably that same day, or the day after that. but she gave him her address, and he starts writing letters. and in one of the first letters, or maybe even the first one, he describes the first time he saw her at the train station in marseille only a month before, says it was a wonderful memory, maybe the most important day of his life, etc etc

[main character]

ok, so to go back to the scene, once i get off the train, he carries my luggage, then we start talking. i tell him i'm 23, i live in oran with my mother and sisters, work as a secretary, etc etc, then he keeps asking questions, tells me a bit about his life, that he lives in dakar but comes from geneva, etc etc and then we are outside the station and he invites me for coffee and i accept. so we'll start filming the scene from the moment she gets off the train right?

[screenwriter]

probably from the moment she gets up from her seat and starts walking towards the door. maybe a few minutes before, when she's still sitting and the train guy announces they're arriving in marseille.

[main character]

is she sitting in the window or aisle seat? maybe she's looking out the window.

[screenwriter]

i think she's sitting in the aisle seat. that's how he sees her first. her sister is sitting next to the window, she's

the one looking out. she's melancholic because she just left her fiancé in paris.

[main character]

right. does her sister get married soon after?

[screenwriter]

no, she actually never got married. i don't know what happened with her fiancé. i just know she stayed on living with my great-grandmother in oran, then in marseille. we used to visit them a lot when i was a child. she was nice.

[main character]

ok, so let's imagine she's sitting next to her sister, who's sad because she just left her fiancé who never became her husband, even though she doesn't know that yet, right now she still thinks they'll get married and she'll move to paris. and that's when he sees her. i mean, that's when he sees me. he also got on the train in paris right?

[screenwriter]

yes, i'm guessing he was there for work, the head of the company he worked for was in paris. they had one base in paris and one in dakar, which was the capital of the colonial government of french west africa at the time. i think he often travelled from paris to marseille, then to dakar, then to wherever he had to work.

[main character]

ok, so she's still sitting, in the aisle seat, to be nice to

her sad sister who wants to look out the window. does  
she see him or does he see her first?

[screenwriter]

he sees her first. she doesn't see him or really look at  
him before he asks if she needs help with her luggage.

[main character]

yes, that's when he steps in and asks that stupid  
question.

[screenwriter]

you find it stupid? i can still change that.

[main character]

no, no don't change it. it's stupid, but in a good way.  
it's stupid in an interesting way. i mean, don't change  
it, i think it's fine like this, i like it, it makes sense.

[screenwriter]

ok, then let's keep it for now.

[main character]

so i answer back "no, i'm not from paris" and then  
laugh a little, just to be polite. i don't really find him  
handsome or funny, and i start walking away but he  
comes back and carries my luggage.

[screenwriter]

exactly.

[main character]

then we're on the platform and he walks next to me

and my sister, who's trying to push him away because she thinks he looks suspicious, and when we're in front of the station he asks if we want to go for coffee. i say yes, my sister says no, then i say yes again so she says yes and we go.

[screenwriter]

your sister tries to pull you away, she even tries to signal a cab but then she just gives in for the coffee. the cab driver even honks at her when she says no and it becomes a whole thing.

[main character]

she's not really in the mood but knows i would go anyway, with or without her. it sounds like she's feeling really low and already knows it's the end of her own love story.

[screenwriter]

maybe. but i think she still makes several trips from oran to paris in the years after that, because in some other letters he mentions that her sister will transport photographs or small gifts for them from france to algeria or algeria to france. she becomes like an intermediate.

[main character]

i see. do you have pictures of her too?

[screenwriter]

i can look around, but i really don't think so. i just know she was already wearing really big and thick glasses at the time, she was the only one in the family

to wear glasses.

[main character]  
that's funny.

[screenwriter]  
now that i think about it, i'm pretty sure she was even  
his witness at their wedding. i remember this picture  
of her signing a paper, and then posing with the two  
of them at the city hall in oran.

[main character]  
you mean she was your grandmother's witness?

[screenwriter]  
no, i think she was my grandfather's. he didn't have  
any friends in oran, he had just moved in from  
geneva a few days before their wedding, and no one  
from his family came. but yes, there's a picture of  
the three of them in front of the city hall, which had  
these big lion sculptures in front.

[main character]  
yeah, i've heard about these lions, i think they're still  
there today.

[screenwriter]  
yes, i think so too. ok, let's get back to the scene?

[main character]  
yes !

[screenwriter]  
where were we?

[main character]  
middle of the page. we can take it from when they  
start walking the three of them down the stairs  
towards the cafe in front of the train station. he's  
carrying all three luggages, one falls down the stairs  
and opens up, they pack everything back in and start  
laughing, not the sister, only the two of them.

[screenwriter]  
yes, basically that's when the opening scene ends.  
they arrive at the cafe, sit down, and it cuts there. we  
immediately move on to the next scene, two months  
later when she's back in oran and receives his letter.

[main character]  
sent from paris?

[screenwriter]  
no, from dakar.

[main character]  
didn't he send any letters from paris?

[screenwriter]  
he went straight to dakar from marseille, a few days  
after they met.

[main character]  
right. but this is in reality or just in the story?

[screenwriter]

no, this is reality. it really happened this way. i mean,  
that's what i'm guessing from the letters.

[main character]

yeah, so these are the facts.

[screenwriter]

yes, i mean, the facts are: they met in marseille, at a  
train station, then she went back to oran and he went  
to dakar. the first letter i ever found was written from  
dakar, but it may be that it's not the first letter. this is  
the data i have, the rest is partly fiction, in the sense  
that -

[main character]

sorry, i can't hear you anymore, the signal is low.

[screenwriter]

can you hear me now?

[main character]

not really, i think the connection cut, they told me  
there was another room somewhere with more  
reception but i haven't found it yet, let me just move  
to the room next door.

[screenwriter]

sure.

[main character]

ok, can you hear me?

[screenwriter]

yes, can you hear me better now?

[main character]

yes ! i guess this is the right room.

[screenwriter]

it looks so sunny, how's the weather like?

[main character]

the weather's great, maybe we'll go to the sea after rehearsals. i'm only here until tomorrow though, we're going back to paris then back to geneva.

[screenwriter]

well, you should enjoy the sun while you can.

[main character]

yes. so what were you saying about fiction? it cut just then...

[screenwriter]

um, i guess i was just trying to explain that some elements i know for sure happened, because of the letters i read, or because someone told me, but others i just invented and decided they would happen this way.

[main character]

yes, others are imagined. it's fiction. i mean, imagination is real too.

[screenwriter]

yeah, in a way, i guess you're right. i just thought that since anyways i don't have all the elements, i can't really be sure of what happened, i have to fill in the gaps. it feels lighter to fill them in with fiction.

[main character]

do you want me to fill in the gaps too?

[screenwriter]

what do you mean?

[main character]

i mean, do you want me to be as close to her as i can? because i can read all the letters, look at all the photos, and try to be as close to reality as i can. or i can just read one letter, look at one photo and imagine the rest from the script.

[screenwriter]

let's work from the script. in a way, it's all about working with real people about real people's lives to convince ourselves of some reality.

[main character]

ok, then should we go back to the scene?

[screenwriter]

yes, let's.

opening scene: bright flowers, somewhere outside of oran

camille kaiser, 2021

based on a conversation with nastassja tanner