

LEFT BANK
(pilot)

(note: dialogue in *italics* is in French, subtitled)

EXT. CLUB NOW!, PARIS, 1947 - NIGHT.

Outside Club Now!, a swarm of BEATNIK YOUTHS, most in black, some even wearing sunglasses despite the hour and the cold.

GENDARMES push them back as they surge to try and get in.

Two GENDARMES emerge from inside carrying a YOUNG GIRL in their arms. She's fainted.

They lay her down. She comes round. The crowd goes quiet.

YOUNG GIRL
...God is dead.

The crowd ROARS and surges again towards the entrance. Gendarmes beat them with batons.

INT. CLUB NOW! - MOMENTS LATER.

Inside it's rammed. PEOPLE push and shove to get a better view of the speaker. A fight breaks out, a chair is thrown.

On stage is JEAN-PAUL SARTRE (40), squat and ugly, wall-eyed behind giant specs, gesticulating wildly with his ever-present pipe. He tries to be heard above the din.

SARTRE
What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists -- and defines himself afterwards.

A PAPARAZZO pushes through but is thrown to the floor.

SARTRE (CONT'D)
Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it.

The pap stands up, shoves a couple out the way, and aims his camera -- but he's then punched in the face and knocked out.

SARTRE (CONT'D)
Man simply is. He is nothing else but that which he makes of himself.

A chair goes flying past Sartre. He calmly carries on.

SARTRE (CONT'D)
That is the first principle of existentialism.

AT THE SIDE OF THE STAGE, watching:

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR (38), imperious and elegant even in a tatty jumper, a turban on her head, smoking.

ALBERT CAMUS (35), Algerian, stylish trench-coat with collar up, Bogart-handsome, Gauloise permanently in mouth.

RAY WATTS (35), African-American, nerdish, attentive.

RAY

I can't tell if they love him, or want to kill him.

CAMUS

The boys love him because their girlfriends love him. The girls love him because their parents hate him.

RAY

So who's throwing the chairs?

As the crowd waits for Sartre's next pronouncement, a shout goes up from the crowd --

MALE VOICE

Bullshit!

Scanning the crowd, Ray sees VINCENT BRASSON (18) -- thin, kinetic, wild-eyed -- pushing to the front of the stage.

CAMUS

The Communists.

DE BEAUVOIR

They hate him because the girls and the boys love him.

Vincent shouts at Sartre.

VINCENT

You're a fraud.

Camus wades through the crowd to Vincent.

CAMUS

Enough, Vincent. You missed the war. Don't make us all suffer.

VINCENT

How can you stand to listen to this?

(shouting at Sartre)

Calls himself a Marxist? How is this bourgeois crap Marxist?

The crowd reacts angrily but Sartre shushes them.

SARTRE

We must allow dissenting voices.

Vincent climbs on the stage to face off against Sartre.

VINCENT

You don't speak for us. What do you even know of us? You've never done a real day's work in your life.

SARTRE

This is just what the Right wants -- for us to tear each other apart.

VINCENT

You've nothing but empty words.

SARTRE

We fight for the same freedoms.

VINCENT

We don't fight on the page --

Suddenly, Vincent pulls out a pistol.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

-- we fight on the streets.

Panic in the crowd. Gendarmes push in. Vincent dashes out the side of the stage, bumping past Ray.

INT. CAFE DES FLORES - LATER, NEAR DAWN.

The Cafes des Flores: smoke-filled bohemian haunt of bums, singers, prostitutes -- and writers. Sartre and his gang sit at a table smoking and drinking.

SARTRE

Who'd you rather sleep with -- a Communist or a capitalist?

CAMUS

Not this again.

SARTRE

Ssh. Ray's not done it.

(to Ray)

Come on -- who?

RAY

Okay... A Communist.

SARTRE

So you're happy to share her?

DE BEAUVOIR

And Stalin gets to watch.

RAY

A capitalist then.

SARTRE
 (to De Beauvoir)
Ah, typical American.

DE BEAUVOIR
 She will squeeze every last drop --

SARTRE
 -- then kick you out on the street.

CAMUS
That doesn't sound so bad.

The others laugh.

RAY
 (to Camus)
 What's your answer?

SARTRE
 Camus would have them both --
 (to De Beauvoir)
*-- but feel terrifically guilty
 after.*

RAY
 Simone?

SARTRE
 Oh, the Beaver would teach them the
 error of their ways --

He pecks her on the cheek.

CAMUS
-- then run off with their wives.

De Beauvoir blows smoke in Camus's face in response.

RAY
 So what's the right answer?

SARTRE
 There is no right answer. Just the
 choice you make.

RAY
 But if they're both bad choices,
 what do you do? Nothing?

SARTRE
 Ah, but that's a choice too.

RAY
 So you're doomed?

SARTRE
 Not doomed -- you're free.

RAY
But you have to make a choice.

SARTRE
That is the burden of freedom.

RAY
(to Sartre)
So come on then -- what choice
would you make?

CAMUS
(anticipating Sartre)
If only there was a third way...

SARTRE
(excitably)
If only there was a third way, yes.

RAY
What's the third way?

CAMUS
Up the arse.

Camus and Sartre laugh, but Ray does not understand.

RAY
Well, does it matter, one's
politics, when it comes to sex?

DE BEAUVOIR
You've not been in Paris very long,
have you?

More laughter. Ray looks at De Beauvoir, holds her gaze.

CAMUS
Another drink?

Sartre shakes his head and stands up, somewhat unsteadily.

SARTRE
*Les Temps goes to print this
evening.*

CAMUS
So?

SARTRE
So I should probably write it.

Sartre chuckles. Takes out a vial of pills, pops a couple in his mouth. Sees Ray watching and motions for him to take one.

SARTRE (CONT'D)
How you say? ...Rocket fuel.

He mimes his head exploding. Amused, Ray pockets the pill.

EXT. CAFE DES FLORES - MOMENTS LATER.

Very refreshed, the four of them exit the cafe. It's bitterly cold, a dusting of snow on the ground, weak sun rising.

A gaggle of PAPARAZZI bears down upon them, cameras popping.

PAPARAZZI 1
*Monsieur Sartre, is existentialism
a threat to the Church?*

PAPARAZZI 2
*Camus, does your work promote
suicide amongst the youth?*

PAPARAZZI 3
*Simone, will you and Sartre ever
marry?*

Ray is taken aback. Sartre poses. Camus looks pissed off. De Beauvoir tries to disappear into the background.

SARTRE
You're missing the real scoop.

He puts his arm round Ray's shoulder.

SARTRE (CONT'D)
*You have here America's greatest
new writer -- Mr Raymond Watts.
Swapped racism for freedom in
liberated Paris.*

The paps snap Ray. As they crowd around him, Sartre ducks away and sneaks off with Camus.

PAPARAZZI 1
Watts, you an existentialist too?

Something about this question -- the pap's good English? -- catches Ray's attention. But before he has time to think, De Beauvoir pulls him down the street. They start to run.

The paps pursue them, but it's icy and they slip and bump into each other -- camera equipment goes flying.

EXT. PARIS ALLEY - MOMENTS LATER.

Ray and De Beauvoir duck down an alley, keep running until they believe they are safe.

They stop, breathless and laughing. De Beauvoir leans against a wall. Ray looks at her... approaches...

...and they kiss passionately.

INT. CAMUS'S APARTMENT BUILDING - LATER.

Camus climbs the stairwell to his apartment. He gets halfway up and has to stop. Starts coughing -- a terrible rasping.

He pulls out a handkerchief and hacks into it. Once finished, he looks to see the handkerchief is spotted with blood.

INT. CAMUS'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER.

Camus enters his apartment to be greeted by the sound of BABIES CRYING. His reaction suggests he'd like to turn straight around and leave. But he heads into --

DRAWING ROOM

Where his wife FRANCINE (35) is bouncing one of their newborn twins CATHERINE on her knee while the other, JEAN, wails in his cot. Francine is sophisticated, smart -- but right now looks totally frazzled.

CAMUS

They sound hungry.

FRANCINE

She's sucked me dry.

CAMUS

I'll warm a bottle.

FRANCINE

The gas went off hours ago.

Camus picks up Jean and paces around the room with him until he stops crying. He smiles at his helpless little son.

Camus sees a half empty bottle of red wine on a table.

CAMUS

Have you been up all night?

FRANCINE

Like you?

CAMUS

*(half to himself)
We must hire the au pair.*

FRANCINE

So I've failed as a mother?

CAMUS

Stop being ridiculous.

FRANCINE
It's an extravagance.

CAMUS
I'll get an advance from Gallimard.

FRANCINE
 (snaps)
An advance for what?

Off Camus, wounded --

EXT. PARIS STREET - LATER

Ray and De Beauvoir stroll together as snow begins to fall.

RAY
 I couldn't stop looking at you. I
 was worried he'd notice.

DE BEAUVOIR
 It's not like that with us.

RAY
 What do you mean?

DE BEAUVOIR
 We don't believe in monogamy.

RAY
 But...?

DE BEAUVOIR
 But we are bound to each other. He
 is my double -- and I his.

RAY
 What are you saying?

DE BEAUVOIR
 We made a pact, many years ago.
 Complete honesty. In everything.

Ray looks panicked.

RAY
 So he knows?

De Beauvoir smiles, goes to kiss him... Just then --

FURTHER DOWN THE STREET

There's a sudden commotion. Ray and De Beauvoir look over to
 see a GANG OF MEN, some with rifles, dragging a scrawny young
 woman, ADELE (20), from an apartment building.

The leader of these men is Vincent. He sets a chair down, pushes Adele onto it. As he does so, he glances over and sees De Beauvoir in her embrace with Ray.

DE BEAUVOIR
(half to herself)
Vincent again.

Vincent gestures to one of his cohorts, who hands him an ELECTRIC RAZOR. He switches it on and begins to shave off Adele's long dark hair. A CROWD forms, some shouting encouragement to Vincent.

RAY
What is this?

DE BEAUVOIR
She was a collaborator.

RAY
Her?

DE BEAUVOIR
"Collaborateur horizontale".

Vincent holds up the hair he's shaved off. The crowd roars its approval. Adele sits impassive, almost defiant -- but terrified under the surface.

De Beauvoir heads over to Adele. The crowd parts to let her through. Vincent approaches her, brandishing the razor.

VINCENT
Simone -- you next?

De Beauvoir pushes past him. Pulls a lipstick from her pocket, hands it to Adele.

Adele's hands shake. De Beauvoir takes the lipstick and slowly, deliberately, applies it to Adele's lips. Then she takes a compact mirror from her pocket, hands it to Adele.

Adele regards her fractured image -- shorn and sallow, starkly contrasting with the bright red lipstick. She smiles.

De Beauvoir escorts Adele back to her building. Ray watches, entranced.

The crowd begins to dissipate, much to Vincent's annoyance.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
*No to the amnesty. Death to
collaborators. We are the party of
the 75,000 dead.*

He pulls out his pistol and FIRES it into the air. The crowd panics and scatters.

From further down the street, the sound of a WHISTLE, as gendarmes head towards them.

Vincent makes a run for it -- as he passes Ray he shoves the gun into Ray's hands. Ray is hardly aware of what's happening, still gazing over at De Beauvoir as she returns.

De Beauvoir's eyes widen as she sees the gun. Ray realises -- glances from the gun to the approaching gendarmes and back to De Beauvoir.

De Beauvoir grabs the pistol from him, pockets it, and pulls him away down the street.

INT. HOTEL, CORRIDOR - LATER.

Ray and De Beauvoir walk down the corridor of a decrepit old hotel, stop outside a door. De Beauvoir places her key in the lock. Ray puts his hand on hers.

RAY

Why would you want to know about his affairs? Or him yours?

DE BEAUVOIR

(half joking)

Jealousy is bourgeois.

RAY

Doesn't mean it's not real.

DE BEAUVOIR

Sartre always says -- our love is essential, all others contingent.

RAY

Contingent? Is that what I am?

DE BEAUVOIR

It doesn't mean you're less important.

RAY

What if I want to be more important?

A beat. De Beauvoir looks at Ray.

DE BEAUVOIR

Paris can be intoxicating.

RAY

Meaning?

DE BEAUVOIR

We've know each other less than a month.

RAY

So give me more time.

De Beauvoir kisses him. Then she opens her door and slips inside, leaving Ray in the corridor. Ray stands there for a moment, emotionally conflicted.

Then he turns and walks down the corridor to a door a few metres away. Takes out his own key, opens it and steps into --

INT. HOTEL, RAY AND EDIE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Ray enters to find his (white) wife EDIE (35) lying in bed seemingly wearing every item of clothing she owns -- coat, hat, mittens. She's reading *The Family Reunion* by TS Eliot.

RAY

How's Jen?

EDIE

Still hot. Did you get aspirin?

Ray grimaces.

EDIE (CONT'D)

Great.

Annoyed, Edie goes back to her book. Ray takes off his coat and hangs it on the door.

EDIE (CONT'D)

The electricians went off even earlier today. No wonder she's sick.

RAY

I saw Sartre. He wants me to write for the paper.

Ray wants her to be impressed, but Edie just continues to read her book.

RAY (CONT'D)

(frustrated)

I know it doesn't mean much to you, but it's a big deal.

Edie slams her book down.

EDIE

Will it get us out of this shitty hotel? And don't patronise me.

RAY

If Sartre prints me, every other editor comes calling. You should see how he's treated here -- like Sinatra or something.