

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO INTERVIEW SET -- DAY

Paul and Cal sit on the Interview Set [N.B. SHOULDN'T THIS BE THE BOOK CLUB SET?] with the Book Club trappings. On the coffee table are coffee mugs, reading "Book Club Mug", for all the participants. They are joined by homemaker GRETA SPEY and town librarian BARB MONTGOMERY who sit either side of Cal, and Paul sits in the host's armchair. Greta is dressed in an outfit that initially looks conservative, Barb in one that initially seems simply casual. [ONE APPROACH: AS THE PIECE PROGRESSES INTO ITS MORE OPENLY FRENCH FINALE, THESE OUTFITS WILL REVEAL AN INCREASING AMOUNT OF CLEAVAGE, HEM LINES WILL RISE, HAIR WILL BECOME PRIMPED MORE SEXILY].

PAUL

I welcome back our Town  
Beat Book Club. Joining  
me are municipal librarian  
Barb Montgomery,  
homemaker Greta Spey,  
and Cal Weston who  
returns wearing his  
dapper bibliophile hat.  
How turned the pages this  
week, gang?

All make noises to suggest their latest book-reading assignment wasn't easy.

BARB

Oh boy!

PAUL

Come on, the book wasn't  
that bad, was it?

BARB

Oh no, it was very good -- I  
think -- though I have to

admit my high school  
French was a bit rusty.

GRETA (relieved)

Mine too.

CAL

But you both said you had  
excellent French.

Barb and Greta react sheepishly.

PAUL (chuckling)

Our assignment for this  
week, of course, was to  
read Jean Philippe  
Beauchemin Laplante's  
"Au Gratin".

Paul lifts the copy of the novel from his lap, and places it in the book holder on the table beside him. The card under the holder reads "Book Club Selection". The title and its translation are superimposed on the screen, reading "J. P. Beauchemin, Au Gratin (With Cheese)". The dust jacket of the novel, with title and author's name prominent, is a lurid rendition of an extremely buxom French lass with ample décolletage slurping a finger drenched in Brie, while a beef-cake waiter hovers over her as though offering more wine -- and more.

BARB

I love the cover.

PAUL

"Au Gratin" is simply the  
latest example of the  
renaissance in the French  
language novel that is  
taking place next door to  
us in St. Anne-de-ville.

BARB

And throughout  
Champlain County.

CAL

Good point, Barb.

PAUL

Exciting to think that we're right beside a living Francophone culture here in the heart of North America.

Everyone agrees, as they always do.

PAUL

I really must get over there for a visit.

BARB

Oh yes, it's beautiful.

PAUL

You've been?

BARB

Well no, but I've heard it's quite ... exotic.

PAUL

Greta?

GRETA

My cousin went there on her honeymoon and said it was really very nice. People are soooo different apparently.

CAL

Everyone should make a point of visiting St. Anne-de-ville if they have half a chance, and are up for the adventure. It's fantastic. The nightclubs...!

Greta and Barb imagine visiting St. Anne-de-ville with Cal.

GRETA

Oh I'll bet.

PAUL

Certainly a thriving  
literary scene over there.  
Artistes, cafes, poseurs  
and so forth.

CAL

Which is wonderfully  
rendered in the novel,  
didn't you think Paul?

PAUL

Hm? The thing is, well,  
with this book, anyway, I  
don't know if this happens  
to you, but I'm lying in bed  
and I read the first three  
or four lines when all of a  
sudden, boom, I'm  
unconscious, then the  
alarm is screaming and it's  
the next morning so I can't  
really offer a commentary  
on this one.

Greta? How about a precis of "Au Gratin"?

GRETA

It's a murder mystery.

BARB

More of a spoof on the noir  
genre.

GRETA

Ah, it's set in a bistro... I  
think?

BARB

Yes, a little café in the  
demi-monde of St. Anne's  
quartier Latin.

GRETA

And the main character's a chef.

BARB

A maitre d', actually, George Valgeorge. Valgeorge gets caught up in the intrigues of a group of bourgeois arrivistes on the hunt for debutantes in the cabaret-like milieu.

PAUL

George is a bit of a bon vivant, then?

GRETA

Yes, and he has a liaison with an au pere.

PAUL

Oo-la-la.

GRETA

Which turns grotesque after a mardi gras soiree.

BARB

The au pere's found dead in George's armoire, au naturel, strangled with her own brassiere.

GRETA

Her derriere, well...

BARB

Coated in Camembert.

PAUL

Au gratin!

CAL

Touché.

PAUL

Your critique of Au Gratin,  
Barb?

BARB

The plot was too bizarre  
for my taste, though it has  
a surprise ending that's  
pulled off with panache.

CAL

Yes, nicely camouflaged  
has real eclat. The  
denouement's a bit of a  
let-down though.

GRETA (agreeing without knowing what it means)

I agree, Cal. Very cliché.

BARB

But overall rather drole,  
full of bon mots and laced  
with that soupcon of  
malaise that's become de  
rigueur.

CAL

I find the book somehow  
appropos.

GRETA

Oh yes, very tres  
appropos.

BARB

How so?

Both Barb and Greta have moved quite close to Cal  
now and are fawning.

CAL

A grand burlesque,  
debonair characters with  
savoir faire, suffering a fin-  
de-siecle ennui.

BARB

Mm, chic, risquée, a  
certain je ne sais quoi...

CAL

A perfect pastiche for a  
belle époque.

PAUL

Beauchemin: belles lettres'  
dernier cri. Prix  
Goncourt?

ALL

Absolument.

PAUL

Et bien. Bonne chance,  
Jean-Philippe, et merci  
nos connoisseurs  
littéraires. Barb  
Montgomerie, Greta Spey  
et Cal Weston. C'est  
toujours un plaisir de vous  
voir.

CAL

De rein.

BARB AND GRETA

Enchantée.

PAUL

(Paul  
turns  
to  
camera)

Nous nous voyerons en  
quelques semaines avec  
une autre édition du Town  
Beat "Club de Livre".

CAL, BARB, GRETA

Au revoir. A la prochaine.  
A bientôt.

PAUL (to camera)  
On reviendra en quelques  
instants.

Wide shot of them gesticulating Gallicly in half-light as we go to  
commercial.