

In Which Mad Dog Kicks French Women's Bony Butts

by Con Chapman

I was sitting in my office yesterday afternoon when a friend—whom I will refer to simply as “Mad Dog” because he likes to make an illegal sports bet from time to time—called.

“You’ve *got* to get down here,” he said, not even bothering with a “Hello.”

“Where are you?”



“Faneuil Hall—freakin' Cradle of Liberty.”

“What's going on?”

There was a pause, as if he was choked up and couldn't speak.

“This town is going nuts! We just witnessed history!”



The Dog Man hadn't sounded this excited since . . . actually it was less than a month ago, when the Boston Bruins won their first Stanley Cup in 39 years.

"History? Was a waitress at Durgin Park courteous to you?"



Durgin Park waitress: "Don't take it personally—I'm rude to everybody!"

"No, you mook. The US women's soccer team just beat France—3-1! We're going to the World Cup finals!"

I wondered where the "we" came from. The Dog turns the sports page automatically when he gets back to the soccer scores, skips over the "Help Wanted" ads, and goes straight to the comics. As for women's sports, let's just say if he were interrogated by female U.S. forces in a combat-riven no-woman's-land to see if he was really an American as he claimed, he couldn't name the most recent WNBA champion.

"Since when do you care about women's soccer?" I asked, a bit skeptical. My guess was he just wanted to party.

"Things are kinda slow right now," he admitted. "Hockey season's over, two major sports in lockout, and it's the All-Star break. I gotta make do."

"I can't come down right now," I said. "It's the middle of the work day for people who . . . work."

There was an audible sigh at the end of the line. "How 'bout later—we really need you," he said.

"Why?"

"'Cause you're the only guy I know who reads French. We're gonna go celebrate at a French restaurant."

"You're not going to engage in the sort of jingoistic conflation . . ."

"Have you been reading The New Yorker again?"

"Not since Tina Brown put Rodney King on the cover."



"I heard he was arrested again."

"So what else is new? Anyway, as I was saying, don't use a trivial sports victory to lord it over the French. They're our allies, remember? As Rodney King himself might say, 'Why can't we all just git along?'"

There was silence at the end of the line again. "Okay, but can you help me out a little?"

"Sure."

"What's French for 'sports bar'?"

The Dog spends a lot of time at The Sports Depot, an infamous jock-sniffing *boite de nuit*. Some would say too much, but as he says in his own defense, if that's where people send him his mail, what's he supposed to do—go home?

"Why do you want to know?"

"We want to go chant U-S-A wherever we'd find the most French fans."

I finally understood. I took two years of French in high school, and two in college. I was *un plongeur* at *Le Gerbe de Ble*, the finest French restaurant in Worcester, Mass. I made my way up to *garcon*, where I learned to *parlez-vous* with customers along the lines of "Eighty-six on the escargots, lady."

"Well, Boston is a great town for Francophiles," I said, "so you have a lot of choices. There's *Au Bon Pain* . . . "

"What's that mean?" the Dog asked.

"Some good bread."

I could almost hear his face screwing up in an expression of confusion. "What the hell kind of name is that for a restaurant. Only some of the bread's good? What about the rest of it? What are my other choices?"

"There's *Le Bocage*, the quaint little place that started the whole *nouvelle cuisine* craze in the Boston area."

"Is that the place you're always telling me about with the maitre'd who let you jump the line if you remembered his name?"

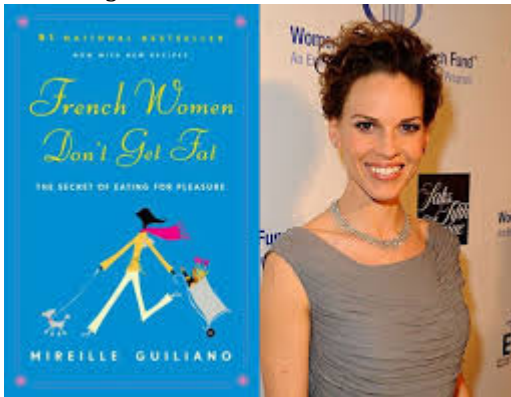
" . . . *and* kissed him on both cheeks. That's Enzo."

"Okay, so what's 'bocage' mean?"

"A grove or a copse."

Again—silence. “You're not helping me here. What's a copse?”
“Sort of like a conflation.”

“Like I say. Anything else in stock?”
“Well, there's *Maison Robert*. It's downtown, conveniently located for major sports riots.”
“Okay, sounds good. What does ‘may-sone ro-bair’ mean?”
“Bob's Place.”
“That's gotta be the one—thanks!”



I heard the phone drop and Dog's voice yelling “C'mon—we're going to ‘*may-sone ro-bair*’ with an effete inflection. “Did somebody bring a copy of ‘*French Women Don't Get Fat*’?—I want to burn it.”

