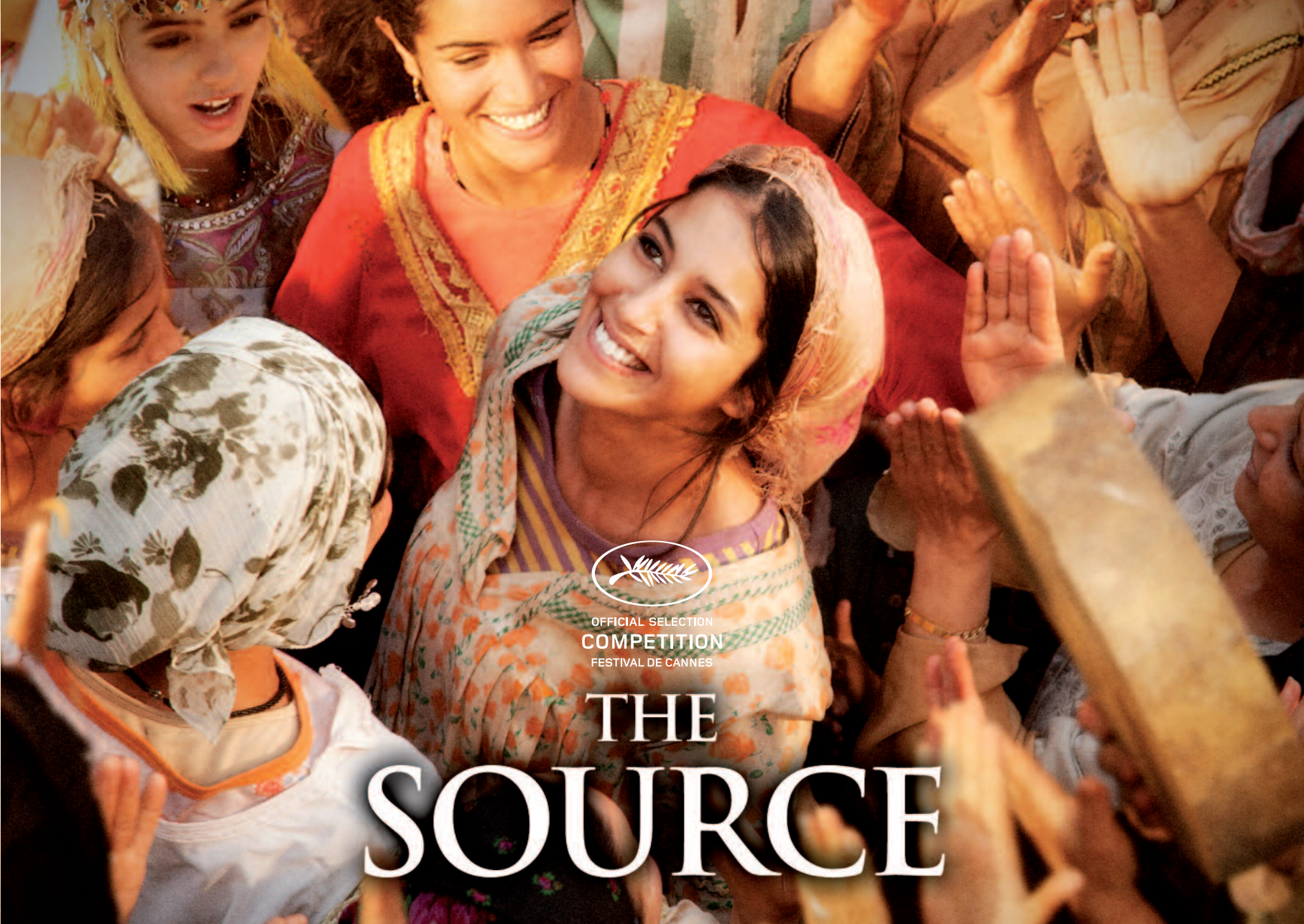
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SOURCE

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PRESENT

THE SOURCE

A film by
RADU MIHAILEANU

With
LEILA BEKHTI ❁ HAFSIA HERZI
❁ BIYOUNA ❁ SABRINA OUAZANI ❁ SALEH BAKRI ❁ HIAM ABBASS ❁ MOHAMED MAJD ❁

IN THEATERS NOVEMBER 2

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S Y N O P S I S

The story takes place in current times, in a small village somewhere between North Africa and the Middle East. The women fetch water from a mountaintop spring in the blazing sun. They've done that since the beginning of time. Leila, a young bride, urges the women to launch a love strike: no more hugs, no more sex until the men run water into the village.

INTERVIEW WITH RADU MIHAILEANU

How did this project come about?

It all began with a true story that happened in Turkey in 2001. There was a small traditional village where women had gone to fetch water at a spring on top of an adjacent mountain every day, since the beginning of time, lugging the heavy buckets back on their bruised shoulders. After a series of accidents, the women decided to take fate into their own hands and waged a love strike that would go on until the men agreed to run water lines to the village. At first, the men didn't take the women seriously, then things took a violent turn. The women stuck to their guns. In the end, the case was settled by the government. More metaphorically, I also dove back into Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, in which a woman, faced with male apathy, incites a love strike to put an end to war. That subject seemed to me to be filled with very contemporary issues.

Were you hesitant about attacking that kind of subject matter?

For a long time, as a French Jewish man, I didn't feel I was qualified to speak about a culture I knew so little about. All the more so since I felt that kind of subject matter had to be approached from within. But I was convinced, from the start, that the film would be more powerful if told within a Muslim context — that would allow us to touch on the Koran and Islam, which are often not very well know and subject to all kinds of clichés and fantasies. So, at first, I looked for a woman director of Arabian extraction who could bring a more accurate point of view to the project. As I didn't find one and had wound up

appropriating the material, my co-producers convinced me to direct it myself. But I immediately imposed two conditions. First, I insisted upon a research period that would allow me, among other things, to go into in the villages and meet the women who lived there. I wanted to take the time to be on intimate terms with that culture so I could define all its nuances and points of view. It also seemed imperative that the film be shot in Arabic, not only out of concern for authenticity and sonority, but also so that the characters weren't speaking the language of their colonizers. I also had to adopt that cultural perspective and try to speak in that voice.

What kind of research did you do?

Alain-Michel Blanc, my co-screenwriter, and I started by reading lots of writings by Arab women, sociology books and works on Islam. We also met with Arab world specialists, like Malek Chebel, Soumaya Naamane Guessous, who have studied the conditions of women. Then we went to villages similar to the one in our story to speak with the women there. They recounted so many anecdotes, which sometimes wound up in the script. We struck up some real friendships and discovered a wealth of material. That trip helped us enormously to gradually slip into their mindset and sort of leave our Western attitudes behind. That may be the loveliest aspect of my craft. Through our research, we learned, for example, that women, even in very isolated villages, have access — in an often rudimentary way — to new technologies. So they have contact with other lifestyles, without ever denying their own traditions. That intersection of civilizations is inherent in the film. As *The Source* takes the form of a contemporary oriental tale, which isn't set in a specific locale, we gathered material from a wide variety of Muslim countries, to find commonalities, especially on the question of women and their relationships with men, children, parents, mothers-in-law, love, work, celebrations, music, etc.

How were the characters sketched out?

Several of the women in the film were inspired by inhabitants of the village where I lived before shooting there. In the house where I lived, there was a couple fairly similar to the Leila/Sami couple. He was a tourist guide and had married a women from outside the village out of love. She was often referred to as "the foreigner," as Leila is in the film. So he was an open-minded man who didn't submit to the tradition of arranged marriages.

It may be her "outsider" status that allows Leila to launch the strike so easily.

She's lived in exile and learned how to reconcile two cultures — her native desert culture, in the south, and the mountain culture — so Leila is freer than the others. Freer also because she's been attacked; she's got nothing to lose and her indignation pushes her into battle. So it was logical for her to lead that female revolt. And it's also because she's protected by her husband's love.

Mother Rifle is an extraordinary character.

She's also someone we met. Older women in the villages often take on considerable notoriety and, once they're widowed, they don't have anyone at home to boss them around anymore. And the "Mother Rifle" that we met used to accompany important village events with songs that metaphorically condemned the men's failings. She embodied a kind of "justice of the peace" — she's been known to denounce unfaithful or physically abusive husbands. We didn't think Leila could convince them alone, she needed some back-up support.

What about the other women who surround Leila?

They make up what we've long referred to as a "central committee" in a strike, in other words, the most militant women. They also happen to be friends. Through this experience, I discovered that they're often really funny and poke fun at sexual issues — but always figuratively. These women are often in need of affection, so they find gratification in syrupy Mexican or Egyptian soap operas. And they retain some of the lines of dialogue from them, like "Te quiero," which Esmeralda constantly parrots in the film!

None of the male characters is completely blameworthy.

No, because, in a certain way, they're all victims. Alain-Michel and I both dislike writing totally positive or totally negative characters. We believe they're all products of a kind of subjectivity that might justify their reasoning. Even Sami's brother isn't just a big boor — we can see that, with so little love in his life, it was logical that he'd turn out that way. The same goes for Mother Rifle's son, who becomes a Islamic fundamentalist as a result of his appalling economic conditions and his fear of "losing face" because he's unable to send his family money.

At heart, the film is an ode to love.

I can't make films that are "against." Despite the tragedy and barbarity all around us, I'd rather connect with the beauty in life, even when I broach major problems. So this film is "for." For the beauty of women and the beauty of love — but a love that can be expressed freely, at the risk of actually threatening that relationship. It's in those circumstances, when love is pushed into a corner, that we can see who is capable of generosity. This film is a cry of love by a group of women who are saying to their men, "Love us and look at us." Because love begins with a look.

Water is also a metaphor for love.
Some traditional Arabic songs tell us that man must "water" woman, as if she were a flower. Or fertile soil. And these women are telling the men not to forget to water them. In other words, they're telling them not to neglect them and to keep looking at them. As long as man doesn't bring water into the village, he can't water them. So the drought that hits the village is a metaphor for the withering heart.

You also touch upon the women's desire to take possession of their own bodies.
That's a central issue, particularly in rural communities. In the name of tradition, a lot of women have been raised with the notion that they're nothing but baby-makers. Some of them bluntly refer to themselves as "breeding cows." I've met several women who've been pregnant 15 or 20 times in their lives. Today the youngest women are demanding contraception, so they can take control of their bodies and the birth rate. You might just as well say that they usually don't even know the notion of pleasure, whereas they come out of a very sensual civilization — from their music and dance to their very spicy cuisine. That's why I used *One Thousand and One Nights*, to remind people that the oriental culture is rich in sensuality, contrary to current clichés that confuse Islam with Islamic fundamentalism.

Culture and education are very present, as factors in emancipation.
More and more women are learning to read and write in countries like Morocco, Tunisia and Libya. But there's still one taboo that the film touches upon — a woman's right to read the Koran and express her opinion on the suras, which are intentionally given to interpretation. Yet the Koran clearly states that, "the human being's duty is to elevate himself through knowledge." That includes men and women. So, in the film, Leila raises that question. Who is keeping women from elevating themselves by learning? That revolution to emancipate women through knowledge remains, in large part, to be done.

Did you know you were going to have an imam intervene from the start?
You have to admit that there are still many prejudiced westerners who see all imams as Islamic fundamentalists, while most of them don't preach violence; they advocate reflection and love for others. To me, it was essential to create an imam who personified wisdom. Even if, out of tradition, he has to take the men's side, we sense that he's embarrassed about espousing their views. In the end, he allows the women to express their opinions and truly listens to them. And the most sublime thing is that Leila offers him another take on the scriptures, which he considers and he understands. So he changes thanks to a woman. He has the humility and the wisdom to realize that she's right.

The locations have their own identities — the steam room, the wadi, and the small room where people take refuge to read and write love letters…
In that kind of community, women meet in places where they can talk and men won't overhear them. That's where they confess all kinds of things and joke among themselves. Those places are very clearly defined — the steam room that men are forbidden to enter while women are there, the wadi where women wash their clothes, and other personal spaces where they can take refuge, for example, to read in private. So we created that secret place where they read books or write letters. And that's also where Leila tells Esmeralda that she absolutely has to learn to read and write, that is undoubtedly what will liberate her.

The language has an extraordinary musicality.

I've always loved the sensuality of the Arabic language. We shot the film in Darija, a Moroccan dialect that has a very melodious quality. In the oriental tradition, things are not stated directly. You must never humiliate anyone; no one should be the loser. Therefore, many exchanges happen through song, poetry and dance. So I wanted some things to be expressed through the song and dance of the women. Those songs and dances had to be luminous, joyous, even if the underlying message was caustic. At first, I had to listen to the language very carefully, as I did with Russian for The Concert, or Amharic and Hebrew for Live and Become. And I also had to pick up on the intonations and accents within sentences. After that, I organized three-month coaching sessions for the actors who didn't speak Darija, so that their phrasing would have the same melody and rhythm as the Moroccans'. The actors did such a great job that we had almost no corrections to make in ADR.

How were you able to direct the actors without understanding the language?

For the first time in my life, I shot an entire film in a foreign language I didn't speak, and which most of my principal actors didn't speak either! But I even found myself correcting the Moroccan actors' intonation. They were often surprised because I was right! In fact, I wound up appropriating the melody of Darija, which was very useful to me in directing the songs, which took on a tragi-comic dimension.

How did you orchestrate the musical sequences?

I started by going to parties, weddings and birth celebrations, which I filmed. I also screened documentaries on those traditional songs and dances. We were very inspired by reality. Then I myself wrote the lyrics to the songs, drawing from Arab and Berber poems, so I could wrap my

mind around the meter of that poetry and understand the metaphors. Because, again, things aren't expressed directly in that language, but always in an oblique, suggestive way.

And the music?

Armand Amar, who knows that culture extremely well and even organized a show in Paris with Moroccan artists, composed the music. As in *Live and Become*, he melded several musical tonalities — from symphonic to traditional instruments, like the oud, which has a combination of strength and tragic nostalgia; the duduk, which he had previously used; and the kamancheh, an Iranian violin with a raspy sound that I really like. He also used two magnificent female Arab voices, as a leitmotif that punctuates the film. That aural mix created the feeling of a tale, while giving the overall piece that instantaneous, haphazard quality I was after.

We're constantly moving between comedy and tragedy…

That's a reflection of my life, and life in general, which is anything but monochromatic! I've been known, at the loss of a lover or a loved one, to make a joke or have an uncontrollable desire to laugh. It's a way of telling myself I'm alive, I'm not completely devastated. When I was making *Train of Life*, I met a lot of former concentration camp prisoners who said they had survived the camps thanks to a sense of humor that had kept them feeling human and brought them comfort when they doubted their spirituality. Despite a huge effort to reduce them to an animal state. It's the same for *The Source*. I realized that the women I had met in the villages, who had been beaten and sometimes raped, were capable of scathing humor. Like the battered wife who claims she fell down the stairs, when she had no stairs in her house. "Yes," she explains, "but that's what women say in Mexican soap operas!" Humor expresses a strength of character, never a weakness.

How was the casting done?

Contrary to my usual way of working, I wrote the role of Leila with Leila Bekhti in mind. I had seen her in Roschdy Zem's film, *Bad Faith*, and thought she was incredible, despite the fact that she was fragile and still a beginner. I asked her to read the treatment very early on, even before I had a final script. That was an even more fabulous exchange. She recommended some books for me to read, including a very beautiful work on the role of the woman in the Koran. She admitted that she'd never given so much of herself to a role and, for a solid month before production began, we worked out every nuance of her character. On a human level, she offered me enormous support throughout the shoot, which wasn't easy. And she impressed me with her talent, her human depth, her will, her strength of character. She's one of the greats!

And the other actresses?

I cast Hafsia Herzi very early on. She has just the right joie de vivre and energy for these young women who want things to evolve, which I needed for the Esmeralda character. Also great talent. I'd also wanted to work with Hiam Abbass for years. But I was considering her for a completely different role. She's the one who suggested playing a more ambiguous character and she was right. As for Biyouna, she was a wonderful surprise! At first, I wondered if she'd be able to handle the long monologues, since she's essentially a singer and less of an actress. But right from the audition stage, I realized that she had everything I was looking for — that authority, the sense of humor, the voice and the irony! She's a great actress. "Biyou" just jumps off the screen! The other fabulous discovery was Sabrina Ouazani. I had mostly seen her in darker films, so much so that I wondered if she could be luminous, light. And in real life, that lightness is who she is. That woman is joy incarnate.

Talk to me about the male roles.

I'd seen Saleh Bakri in *The Band's Visit*, where he had a more monochromatic, linear role. But he has both the sweetness and the indignant side of the Sami character. He has exceptional humanity. Another wonderful discovery was Mohamed Majd, who was in Ismaël Ferroukhi's *Le Grand Voyage*. He's a very accomplished Moroccan actor. He has a fabulous face and he doesn't have to utter a word to express his emotions. The camera just loves him. He plays a sage who loves Leila and Sami with an infinite love, but he's able to see what's out of balance in the community and he attempts to restore peace.

What were your priorities for the mise en scène?

Right from the get-go, I knew this film was going to shake me up after my experience on *The Concert*, where the mise en scène was sweeping and approached that of an American production. I had to cut myself off from that and delve into the truth of the subject matter. I knew I had to be close to the characters, a little like in a documentary, yet give the film a tale-like dimension — in other words, a slight shift from reality. So I used a small, very light camera and shot almost the entire film hand-held. To impose a certain discipline on myself, I didn't take along any grip equipment — no track, no dolly, nothing. I just had a Steadicam, which forced me not to have any rectilinear movements, just looser movements. With that kind of equipment, I came upon characters in more "accidental," more "unexpected" ways, and especially not in a linear way. That's what breathes life into the film. We also worked very hard on the angles and depth of field. I wanted to often have obstacles in the frame or foreground fragments that "encroached" on the character to emphasize that raw, haphazard, non-frontal quality. For example, when Leila is on her knees crying, the tree next to her masks part of her face.

What color palette were you inclined toward?

We wanted to convey both the warmth of the country's colors and the feeling of aridity. So we shot with very intense light, bordering on overexposure, and we tried to capture the ochre of the earth, the mountain and the houses. We also tried to film the copper color of the faces, which gives them a sensuality, yet we were careful to be sure that there was enough separation from the predominately ochre landscapes. We also chose to use very little makeup on the actors, so we'd rediscover the beauty of wrinkles, that wisdom in the skin that the Occident has forgotten.

So was the entire film shot in actual practical locations?

Yes, although we did come to realize that the village we were shooting in, while magnificent by nature, was a little monochromatic and didn't sufficiently express that tale-like universe. So, with the villagers' permission, we brought in a few touches of color and patina, like on the gates or the windows, taking inspiration from Orientalist painting and other villages in the Arab-Muslim world. The same with the costumes, hairstyles, jewelry, we brought together several traditions but were constantly mindful about maintaining a cultural, chromatic coherence.

The film is incredibly resonant, in terms of the revolutions that are current shaking the Arab world.

After making several trips to the Maghreb countries, I noticed that women had more and more access to education and would soon fill administrative jobs and positions of responsibility in companies. So, thanks to their diplomas, women would gradually begin to access positions of authority in the elite of Arab societies.

On top of that, in reading books on the dialogue between technological modernity and the Arab civilization, it seemed inevitable to me that, at some point, women would demand more and more rights and less rigidity in their conditions. Which is not at all in conflict with the Koran.

So I figured that, when the Arab revolutions took place — which was inevitable, sooner or later — they couldn't happen without the participation of women. Because the moment has undoubtedly come for women to lead some real, non-violent revolutions. Because men are no longer capable of non-violence nor of that kind of lucidity. Working on this film, that was the bet that I took. Today, I'm following those amazing "Arab Spring" revolutions with great interest. But you have to ask yourself, which revolutions are involving women and which revolutions aren't involving them? Will those revolution go as far as addressing intimacy — the domestic realm — or school — the educational realm? Once those two revolutions are won — at home and in the classroom — we'll have achieved a veritable democratic equality between the sexes. And a real chance for democracy. In any case, that's what's happening in Tunisia and it's very hopeful.

CAST

Leila ..... Leila Bekhti
Loubna / Esmeralda ..... Hafsia Herzi
Vieux Fusil ..... Biyouna
Rachida ..... Sabrina Ouazani
Sami ..... Saleh Bakri
Fatima ..... Hiam Abbass
Hussein ..... Mohamed Majd
Hasna ..... Amal Atrach

TECHNICAL CREDITS

Directed by ..... Radu Mihaileanu
Screenplay by ..... Radu Mihaileanu
..... Alain-Michel Blanc
In collaboration with ..... Catherine Ramberg
Adaptation and Dialogue ..... Radu Mihaileanu
Composer ..... Armand Amar
Director of Photography ..... Glynn Speeckaert, SBC
Editor ..... Ludo Troch
Sound ..... Henri Morelle
..... Selim Azzazi
..... Bruno Tarrière
1st Assistant Director ..... Olivier Jacquet (AFAR)
Production Manager ..... Grégory Valais
Production Designer ..... Christian Niculescu
Costumes ..... Viorica Petrovici
Post-Production Supervisor ..... Mélanie Karlin
Produced by ..... Denis Carot
..... Marie Masmonteil
..... Radu Mihaileanu
International Sales ..... EuropaCorp
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