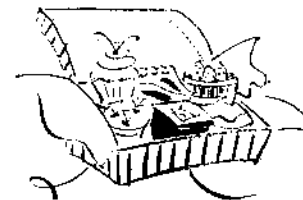


PHILIPPE DELERM

WE COULD ALMOST
EAT OUTSIDE



*An Appreciation
of Life's Small Pleasures*

Translated from the French by Sarah Hamp

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The Tour de France

THE TOUR DE FRANCE means summer. Endless summer, scorched by the meridian July heat. Inside, the Venetian blinds are down and life takes on a slower pace as shafts of sunlight catch the dancing dust. It's bad enough staying indoors when the sky is such a deep blue. But it seems crazy to flop in front of the television, when the forests look so lush and the water sparkles so tantalizingly. And yet you're watching the Tour de France. You're respecting a ritual, not indulging in wanton idleness. And you're not just watching this year's Tour de France. You're watching all the Tours de France ever. Each shot of the *peloton* heading along the roads of Auvergne or Bigorre recalls all the packs from the past. Old-fashioned woollens hide just beneath the surface of those fluorescent outfits—

Anquetil's yellow, embroidered with the "Helyett" insignia; the blue-white-red of the short-sleeved Roger Rivière; the dark purple and yellow of Raymond Pouliodor, sponsored by Mercier-BP-Hutchinson. In place of those disk wheels, you see tubular tires slung across the shoulders of Lapébie or René Vietto. The teeming tarmac of L'Alpe-d'Huez gives way to the lonely scree of La Forclaz.

Someone always says: "What I really like about the Tour is the scenery."

You travel across an overheated and festive France, people strung out in a thin ribbon along her plains, towns and mountain passes. The osmosis between man and environment looks like child's play, at times overexcited and fanatical. But a bit of ribald humor to offset the stony backdrop of Galibier, or the mists of Tourmalet, only serves to heighten the mythical dimension of our heroes.

The flat stages may be less decisive, but watching them is all part of the ritual. Everything becomes more compact, with the prize for ingenious maneuvers going to the press. Surprise upsets have little impact on the overall rankings. What matters is the idea of the whole of France coming together in the time of sunshine and harvest, even if only for a moment. One summer looks very much like another on the television screen. The most exciting moments taste of mint cordial.