This little sullen flower, folded in on herself; tight as a bud, sat on the ground, a step or two away from several stalls at the weekly marché in Salernes, known as the terra cotta tile capital of all of Provence. Generally, the town seems prosperous enough. Some tile factories have failed, but, as in any industry, businesses come and go. And the number of tile manufacturers and vendors seems to hover at around 35 — not bad for a town of about 3200 souls sitting on just upwards of 15 square miles of Provençal farm land, cornering a light industry in one of the most highly developed countries in the world. There are so many terra cotta factories here, because, after all, the terra in these parts is mainly the red clay characteristic of the product.

This day, like any marché in summer, especially, the marketplace bustles. At 9am, every convenient parking lot is full, as are all the legal spaces in the streets, plus all the illegal ones that pass in common practice. There are three major produce stalls, and two organic farm stands, plus a small producteur stall, meaning the meager selection was grown by the seller. It’s the latter that has the best looking items. What I mainly buy from her this morning I turn into today’s lunch, a ragout of eggplant, tomatoes, giant elongated shallots of the sort we never see in the United States, very fresh garlic, with thick plant purplish skin, rather than a dry whitish, papery, husk, picholines denoyautées nature, that is, green olives, pitted and cured (the “nature” means they have not been marinated or flavored with herbs or garlic), pine nuts, organic mushrooms (champignons de crème, we know them as “cremini”), a bright red bell pepper, a good cup of local olive oil (from the mill in Aups) and a dollop each of wine vinegar, white wine, and armagnac, which gets flamed off, while flavoring the sauce with capers, Tunisian spices, two healthy spoonfuls of home-made harissa, and a mess of...
Office of Information for the Youth of Touton is quoted, “Prices haven’t stopped climbing. It’s already hard to find an apartment if you’re working, so when you’re a student, they make it tough for me. The ones that don’t have parental help to back up are really worried.”

Talk about homelessness. At home I walked the streets of Niza, a city of nearly half-a-million, and there are signs that high season is starting sluggishly. Restaurants are not full, nor are they crowded, even not along the sunny Cornes Sable, where eatery after eatery, without interruption, and each offering menus that seem to have been cloned, offer archetypal dishes of French clichés, always tables have available. Even the most popular, their terraces bustling with bistroth with rose-swigging tour groups, have plenty of seats. Here and there, as you prove the covers – the scene with its own dynamic of the flower market stalls now in the full splendor of the panoply of estivales blooms – as in the streets of the city itself and of the back alleys of the Old Town, almost all of them are up for grabs.

They seem to have gone to the same school of modeling, as if for an eternal calendar. For all of them, this is still summertime,
sinuous pose, every city block, being the proven posture for the greatest monetary return, is merely repeated by each new supplicant in mimicry; the perennial, repeated, mimetic. Of course, the disadvantage is that it ultimately induces a blindness in the would-be donor. Seens one begger, seen them all – so undifferentiated in the end are they, and so uniform, in every sense, that they become part of the cityscape. The change and the new generation has washed them out. In part, it is the humbles, and their reputation, which have helped spawn a long term resonance of right-wing extremist political parties, and especially in the sunny, bucolic, lazy south, a significant, if refractory, part of the terrain of Vichy France in World War II. The right is mainly a party of the cities – the stronghold of Jean-Marie Le Pen and his National Front Party. And in the truly rural parts of the country, drabbing and shrunken into a cave, where, in my little village the recent vote went poorly for him, any Le Pen graffito is拿出来 of the walls for fear to “read ‘Le Pino,”” no translation necessary.

Scratch not too deeply, and some in

fortune or distrust of “le bon” emerges out, a haven for you again, shielded (so to encompass an even larger group or people who betray even the least color to their skin) and commingled with the group that is so distinct, that it even becomes more distinct as there evolve ever greater levels of watchfulness. It is the “Roma,” as the Gypsies call themselves, who, fanning out of India in a great diaspora in the 10th century, ended up in Eastern Europe, among other places. With their own language, culture, and xenophobia, they live apart, and their legendary, albeit stereotyped, modes of interacting with white racers – all this is the stuff of the movie, Roma. Of course, in Provence, at least, they are referred to, with your eye to a caromal euphemism, as “Romani,” perhaps origin of the word “Roma,” in a true reference, perhaps an intentional, if misplaced, case of political correctness. Their westward migration from the Punjab, through the Mediterranean into France, and eventually into Europe, first to its eastern enclaves, and ultimately to Germany. From there they wandered further, nomads, in caravans and convoys, not so much homeless, but rootless. No matter.

Unlike the naive Provocals, who have dozens of towns and villages lining the French Riviera, in part, it is the humbles, and their reputation, which have helped spawn a long term resonance of right-wing extreme political parties, and especially in the sunny, bucolic, lazy south, a significant, if refractory, part of the terrain of Vichy France in World War II. The right is mainly a party of the cities – the stronghold of Jean-Marie Le Pen and his National Front Party. And in the truly rural parts of the country, drabbing and shrunken into a cave, where, in my little village the recent vote went poorly for him, any Le Pen graffito is拿出来 of the walls for fear to “read ‘Le Pino,”” no translation necessary.

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“I’m sorry,” I said, “I’m in a hurry.”
He looked at me quizzically, and then at my car. “Parking?” he asked me. Clearly, from his posture and the particular inter-negative tone, and the way he held his hand, he meant for me to infer that I was to pay him for attending the lot. “It’s free,” I said, “sorry,” and walked toward the marketplace. He looked sad.

As I walked, with my basket of recyclable bottles and packaging, with my three-thousand dollar camera dangling from my shoulder, I considered several things. I considered that possibly, by some stretch, he was legitimate. I considered the consequences of having to return a rented car with long, keyed, scratches along the side (a self-important thought this one; there were at least a hundred-fifty cars in that lot, with a likely conversion rate for my young entrepreneurial newspaper salesman of, I would guess, one to two percent—a vengeance would be a losing business; it was market day, and the Police Municipal, not to mention the local gendarmes, were patrolling).

My conscience nevertheless got the better of me. I turned around and returned to the lot, and sought out Monseur Blouso Rouge. He smiled when he saw me. Held up his newspaper again, pointing at the price. He pointed at the price in Swiss Francs, which was 5.30; I moved his hand, where beneath the palm lurked the price in euros, of two of that denomination.

I put my hand in my pocket and extracted a two-euro coin and handed it to him.

“I’m hungry,” his mentor announced to me. The hunger artist looked at me soulfully, quizzically. What sounded like, “Patron!” passed his lips, which he pursed again, and lifted his fingers. He pointed to the 3,50€ price on the paper.

I put my hand in my pocket again, and grabbed the first coin I felt that I knew not to be a 2-euro piece (they are the largest coin minted). It was a 50-centime piece, which I put in my palm, while he looked at it incredulously. His friend, my buddy, burst into a laugh. No self-control. The defeated one lowered his paper scornfully, and he handed one to the other. Apparently to replace the one I had bought. Perhaps they were on commission. As I walked through the marché, in the direction of the stalls I was interested in browsing, a young girl (not the sullen beauty I was to encounter the next day in Salernes) came up to me with a stack of Sans-Logis and held them towards me. I lifted my personal copy and showed it to her, and she looked at me quizzically, as if to say, “you’re a vendor too?”

Later in town, as I rose from my table where I’d just finished an espresso, I saw my young red-shirt friend striding jauntily, now without his badge, his clipboard or his papers, into the convenience store next to the café. And I knew him, in his natural state, to be irregular in the town, one of the anonymous faces that, in time, grew familiar with repeated encounters.

When I told my friend Y the story at his real estate office later that day, he said, “It’s said to be a mafia.” He meant, not the cosa nostra, but a racket, a scam (a word he didn’t recognize). “Some think it’s possibly the Romanians—not that I have anything against Romanians.” And I am sure he does not. Nor do I •

quinting at his chisel, is another exhortation to the reader: Defendre notre outil de travail et vendre notre journal [Champion our means of work and buy our newspaper]. Hence, by a precarious logic indeed the chisel and the mallet and the wooden block of the estimable Raimbault are made equivalent to the equally estimable tools of the trade of...not the homeless beggar, but the honest tradesman/salesman. And so we have the metaphoric Sans-Logis, a mere two-euros.

And what does this buy the honest consumer? Let us examine the alluring venduette and the consumer? Let us examine the alluring Sans-Logis, a mere two euros.