



FESTIVAL DE CANNES  
2024 OFFICIAL SELECTION  
COMPETITION

# WILD DIAMOND

a film by  
Agathe Riedinger

SILEX FILMS  
PRESENTS



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2024 OFFICIAL SELECTION  
COMPETITION

# WILD DIAMOND

a film by  
Agathe Riedinger

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Liane, 19 years old, daring and fiery, lives with her mother and little sister under the dusty sun of Fréjus in the South of France. Obsessed with beauty and the need to become "someone", she sees reality TV as her opportunity to be loved... Fate smiles upon her when she auditions for "*Miracle Island*".

# INTERVIEW WITH AGATHE RIEDINGER

Interview by Anne-Claire Cieutat

**Liane was already the heroine of your short film *J'attends Jupiter* in 2017. You have carried this character with you for a long time, haven't you? How did it come to be?**

*J'attends Jupiter* and *Wild Diamond* share the same heroine, the same themes, and feed on my fascination for two things. First, the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century "cocottes", like Caroline Otéro, Émilienne d'Alençon or Liane de Pougy. These women with incredible destinies were often born into poverty but, by fiercely weaponizing their charms, they became very wealthy courtesans, saintlike figures, or even princes' wives. My other fascination is for reality television. I rule out artistic or cooking shows, or the Crusoe-like Survivor format. I only watch reality television that showcases the talent of people for "being themselves," and I even consider it a fascinating research subject. Yet I wholeheartedly condemn the class contempt, the hypersexualization of women and the sexism it displays, the rape culture it fosters, the conservative and ultra-consumerist values it promotes.

But from the point of view of the contestants, reality television is often a way to make it in this world. It can be an alternative to joblessness for people who have little access to education or employment, or who suffer from a lack of social and emotional recognition. It proves that success as defined by capitalism is no longer the preserve of the elite. I totally understand why anyone would want to be cast in such programs. They can propel the best contestants towards an exceptional life, filled with money and luxury, but with the unconditional love of fans of all ages. Children as young as six and adults in their fifties watch the shows, and the most famous reality TV celebrities boast more than seven million followers on their social media. I am one of those followers. I am stunned by

the combination of candor and violence displayed in these shows. I am fascinated by these women who overstress their femininity with fake nails, hair extensions, buttock or breasts augmentations, and things that are too long, too short, too tight, or too colorful. They are magicians in a world where appearance prevails. A world that proclaims its freedom, but that relies on self-sacrifice. A world where the display of beauty may seem silly and narcissistic, but where the general over-the-topness, and the supernatural (therefore divine?) curvy bodies are, to me, symptomatic of a fear of being nothing and a desperate need for reassurance.

As I became more engrossed in these two phenomena that came into being more than a century apart, I realized that the trajectories of these women overlapped perfectly. Like the "cocottes," these young women of modest origins experience a meteoric rise in society, they challenge the self-righteousness of our times, celebrate shamelessly the cult of the self, inflame passions, and question the definition of what a "real woman" is. From one century to the next, they tell the story of a "weaker sex" that becomes strong by turning its frailty into a weapon of power, while embodying the three facets to which women are still often tied down: the virgin, the mother, and the whore.

**Your main character is a young woman with a rebellious, warrior temperament, who would do anything to be considered and seen.**

Liane's character is different from what her appearance may let on. She is insolent, impulsive, cheeky. She steals, scoffs at authority, fiddles. She leads her life resolutely, with almost animal fierceness. And if she is so fierce, it is because she doesn't feel loved. To quench this desperate need for love, she does everything in her power to make people look at her, and she makes use of what she thinks is her only weapon: her beauty. She shapes herself to be as perfect as possible, regardless of the physical pain that might ensue. Because her beauty is a way of overthrowing, of seizing power: whoever looks at her will make her exist, whoever desires her will be de facto submissive to her. Her beauty provides her value and dignity.

Liane feels crushed by society, and she is aware of the class contempt she faces. So in the end, by showing-off her spectacular body, she finds a way of escaping reality, of saving herself, lest admitting defeat. "If I am beautiful, people look at me. If I am looked at, I am desired. If I am desired, it means that I am loved." Liane's confusion is so radical that she has trapped herself in a paradox: she has a terrible need for love, but not enough confidence to receive it.

**You have captured many types of gazes...**

*Wild Diamond* is a film about the gaze. Producer Priscilla Bertin and I have always considered it this way. The gaze in film is a very broad concept, and I wanted to explore it by creating a kind of grand trial, since looking involves expectation and judgement. You have society's gaze at Liane, the love/hate gaze of her audience, that feeds her, and her spiteful gaze at her female friends and at men. And of course, her fascination with the icons of reality television and social media. I chose to show reality TV programs through Liane's gaze, because I didn't want to represent them visually. So the shows are always off-camera. Hearing without seeing allowed me to recreate

the mystery, the power that Liane sees in reality television.

But above all, Liane is searching for her mother's gaze, that original gaze that makes us feel special and seen. This maternal gaze is embodied in that of the casting director. By calling Liane, then by taking her in for an audition, this woman expresses interest and desire. In a way, she is the one who brings Liane into the world.

Finally, there is the way the viewer looks at Liane. It is a gaze on which I bet a metamorphosis could happen.

**Liane's father is absent. Apart from Dino, there are no men in her immediate circle.**

The men in the film all have different forms of virility and masculinity. To varying degrees, they embody what makes Liane's dignity. Because she derives pleasure and appeasement from their reactions. She despises them, yet she needs them. She is not looking for romantic love either, she even rejects it. Dino is the only male character who manages to tame her eventually. Because he is rootless like her, and because he believes in her, Liane learns to trust him. Just like her, Dino has difficulty with the pressure to be a "real man." He is expected to be manly, to pretend that nothing gets to him, and to fancy big cars. Although he appreciates Liane's beauty, like all the others, he can also see beauty around him: in nature, in brotherly bonds, or in his love for Liane, which he is not afraid to express. Liane is unfamiliar with such things, and it shakes up her convictions. The other important male figure is the plastic surgeon. He symbolically embodies the father figure in the divine sense of the world. He is the creator. In his presence, Liane keeps quiet.





**The opening shot shows Liane miming a pole-dancing act in an empty parking lot, at night. At the heart of the scene, her heels sparkle like fireflies. The scene is reminiscent of Cinderella, and later on, during the casting sequence, the off-camera female voice evokes an ambivalent fairy-tale godmother...**

The parallel with Cinderella is fortuitous, even if the notion of fairy tale is present in the film, only to be condemned! Because girls are still supposed to want to become pretty princesses, to shine brightly, meet a prince and then fit into the grand social scheme. Even if the lines are shifting, this figure still permeates the media, music, and fashion.

**Religious vocabulary and the theme of faith run through your film: we see Liane praying in the train and teaching Dino the prayer to Saint Joseph; she is a contestant on a reality television show called *Miracle Island*... It is all evocative of a form of crusade and transcendence.**

Self-transcendence! Liane is a believer, and her quest is indeed like a crusade, as she strives for perfection in order to feel loved. She feels accompanied by God and swears by him. Her faith is like a crutch that allows her to ignore those who would like to nip her hopes in the bud and gives her confidence to speak up for herself.

The vocabulary, the casting director, the plastic surgeon, the prayers, the filters, a sportscar in a reflection, devotion more generally: the film is punctuated with religious motifs, which are part of the broader question of myth and illusion. Two elements symptomatic of societies in crisis, two essential pillars of reality television. So, when Liane auditions for *Miracle Island*, the gates of heaven open a little. From now on, she is to be either admired or envied. But in any case, people will talk about her. And if they do, it means that she is rising.

**Liane mistreats her body. When she tattoos herself or when she considers plastic surgery...**

Liane goes to any lengths to look beautiful. She doesn't realize that she is hurting herself. She transcends herself. She is in control, all-powerful. She is a magician who transforms things, from a pair of shoes to her own body. Her beauty channels a life drive to become someone. From the very beginning of the film, even at the age of 19, we can tell that she has already had some work done. She submits to the old-age refrain that a woman must suffer to be beautiful and be beautiful to be worth anything. Of course, women's voices are heard more clearly today, of course their position, their work, their integrity are more respected now, but the social schema still holds that a woman is only really a woman if she is physically attractive.

These days, we keep being told that beauty and self-esteem go hand in hand. Magazines, advertising, television, social media, fashion – there is a whole climate that feeds the demand for the sexual enhancement of the being. Social networks are flooded with ads for plastic surgery clinics offering discounts with promotional codes, as if they were selling mere creams. Videos of ever younger women filming themselves on operating tables, covered in bandages and high on painkillers, are liked, commented on, and shared. Not to mention the pumps, suction cups, tighteners, retractors, and refiners – all of them pink, of course – that are touted by celebrities, bought by teenagers and fantasized about by little girls. Now anyone can become an icon. So now more than ever, women are reduced to having to be beautiful. And to show it. This is really ambivalent, because beauty has also been an empowering tool for many women since the dawn of time. You cannot but think: what does it mean to be beautiful and to be respectable? Is natural beauty more valid and authentic than fabricated beauty?

**In a sequence where Liane is putting on make-up, you film her routine as if it were a tribal rite. You also direct the viewer's gaze in the process.**

Contouring is Liane's first mask. In fact, it is the first mask of all since we have been wearing make-up from time immemorial to appear powerful and impress others. Underneath a sculpted face, there is a multitude of gestures, hues and textures that delineate, streak, and draw the different parts of the face. This painting is so magical that it can totally change the axis of a nose, for instance. It is art!

**This hyper sexualization contrasts with the fact that Liane is a virgin.**

Hyper sexualization and virginity are not mutually exclusive notions. Liane is voluntarily hypersexualized to attract attention. Yet, she feels no desire. She has shut herself behind her image, so much so that she is completely disconnected from her own body and sensations. She is aware of the fact that she goes against what society expects of her in terms of sexuality, which generates an enormous amount of pressure. But her virginity vindicates her feeling of being different, and therefore destined for a grandiose fate.

**Liane's mother is referred to as a "shadow" or a "breath" in the dialogues, yet she is far from stupid.**

It was important to me that Sabine wasn't just dumb and mean, that she had a sensible view of the world and also firm convictions. She knows that she did wrong by Liane, and she could have used this hindsight to mend things with her, and to arm her daughters to face the world. But she cannot do it, and she prefers to throw in the towel rather than to question herself. Her pride breeds violence.

**And what about Liane's friends, and her little sister?**

It was necessary for Liane not to be socially cut off from the world, so that we could see exactly how she turns her back on it. So, Liane has girlfriends who represent various ideals of life and women's destinies, which are the opposite of what she dreams of. They are invaluable in showing how everyone has their own way of doing things, and there are various ways to have "the good life." Together they form a unit of young women who are struggling - a young mother, a precarious worker, an unemployed woman looking for love – and who defend a dignity every bit as great as the one Liane projects onto the stars she idolizes.

Liane also has a little sister, Alicia, who is the only person that she wants to protect. Firstly, because she refuses to let her sister be sent to a children's home, as she was for a time, but also because she wants to pass on to her her codes of self-respect and of femininity as an all-powerful figure. Alicia's character also allows me to denounce the hyper sexualization of girls that consumer society produces through toys, fashion, the media, social networks and so on.

**You take a really tender look at your characters, while at the same time casting a critical look on the alienation that faces them...**

Liane belongs to a category of young people who are disillusioned with the future, who lack self-confidence and have normalized violence. She feels ostracized by a society that does not see her going anywhere. So, she reacts, and rightly so. Like most young people, she feeds on fast culture, and her main reference points are the myths conveyed by social media. Nothing is ever pretty enough, big enough, strong enough. While this may be seen as a romantic take on life, or a certain resistance to prevailing fatalism, I also see it as an illustration of the diktat that assumes that self-esteem lies in power, and power in money and beauty. Everything has become extreme. We live under the dominion of indecency, shameless luxury, and celebrity for all.





These displays of success create such a racket that it becomes difficult to tell illusion from reality. More and more young people compare themselves, are afraid of not being enough, become even more hung-up, more frustrated, more violent, more alone. Liane's desire is not so much to crush the other as to stand out from the crowd, be seen, and be granted the value that society denies her.

### **The comments on Liane's social networks punctuate the narrative and invade the frame, just like they invade her mental space...**

These comments appear all at once in a single block, slamming the whole picture like a sledgehammer. They are built around a love/hate dichotomy, the same I have read under the photos of reality TV celebrities, and they illustrate the weight of what the public demands of Liane, but also what fuels her. These comments are like seals that validate her and tell her: "Your existence is strong enough to provoke a reaction." These blocks are like tablets of the law, patents of nobility, digital poems, founding pillars. For all these reasons, it was important to me that the musicality of the sentences depart from reality, that there be no abbreviations or spelling mistakes, that the font have serifs, and that the typography be impeccable.

### **How did you cast your film?**

In order to be consistent with the subject, the geography and the political approach of the story, I wanted to work mainly with non-professional actors who live in the South of France. I was lucky enough to work with Julie Allione, who did an open casting call over almost eight months to find Liane. It was not an easy task, as I was looking for a young woman who could be Liane and yet have the necessary distance to carry the film's themes.

Meeting Malou Khebizi was very moving. Her sensitivity, strength and precision are mind-blowing. She is at once very close to the character and very different. She approached Liane's appearance by

working backwards from everything she had personally constructed. This led to long and sometimes heated discussions! We spent a lot of time unraveling the physical codes of seduction. Tilting your head, popping your hip to the side, crossing your legs, smiling, touching your hair... All these unconscious micro-gestures betray a seductive approach, very different from Liane's. I kept saying to Malou: Liane is a warrior, she walks with her shoulders forward, sinking her feet into the ground, which is far from the ethereal look one would expect from someone wearing such heels. She looks at people from under her brows, ready to pounce. She sniffs, coughs, moves abruptly. Her body language contrasts with the image she has created for herself. She won't give in to the pressure to be delicate and seductive."

Liane's three friends and Ashley, who plays her little sister Alicia, have also been found through the open casting call. Each of them has their own truth, a style, a phrasing, a body that convey something that is too seldom seen in film, and I wanted to keep that intact to speak of a youth that is not conventional. They all attended workshops to learn how to read and express their characters' emotions, and to recognize those of others, to detect what sounds right and what doesn't, and to deintellectualize their bodies in front of the camera.

For the part of Sabine, Liane's mother, I wanted to work with Andréa Bescond. She immersed herself in the character, completely letting go of her image, which was impressive. To me, it was very powerful that she could play this inconsistent mother and show that violence is also transmitted by women.

As for Dino, I quickly chose Idir Azougli, because I find him immensely poetic and fragile and, like Liane, he doesn't have the personality that his physique may suggest. This character was already in my short film and was then played by Alexis Manenti. For reasons of age consistency, Alexis could not play Dino in my feature film, but I wanted to work with him again by giving him the role of Nathan, Dino's big brother. I also like his fragility, hidden beneath a sturdy appearance, and his natural authority. This authority was important,

because his character embodies the family Dino can trust and rely on, as opposed to Liane's negligent one.

The dialogues were carefully written, and their musicality meant a lot to me. So, we rehearsed a lot so that the actors would make them their own and, of course, we corrected the lines that didn't sound right.

### **Why did you choose the 4:3 aspect ratio?**

I think it makes everything look so much better. It enhances the image's graphic composition, the position of masses, light, and shadows, even the air. This format also allows you to work very strongly with the off-screen. And by reinforcing what is out of frame, you narrow what is inside, thus stressing the idea of confinement and suffocation that was essential for *Wild Diamond*. Besides, I wanted the film to be highly immersive, so that we clung to Liane all the time, fully in tune with all the leaps and bounds of her heart, and the 1:33 format allowed me to really fix the viewer's gaze on her.

### **You use all kinds of camera shots. What were your directorial choices, and how did you find the right distance from your characters?**

When I was in art school, I spent all my time taking photographs. So, I experimented with all the aspects of what makes an image. It was even through photography that I started making films. For *Wild Diamond*, one of my most important guidelines was to stay at the same level as my character, so that you could really feel that I was never judging her, nor her environment or her dream. Keeping the right distance meant making sure that no elements of fabrication could be seen. We had to avoid caricature, whether in the representation of the bodies that were already hyperbolic, or of emotions that were always intense. The characters act according to what they understand. The sets, costumes and camera movements were all meticulously designed to make us feel rather than see.

### **How did you work on photography and colorimetry?**

The challenge was to talk about beauty without lapsing into excessive aestheticism, hyper-eroticism, voyeuristic sexiness, flamboyance, or into an image that would be watching itself. A chin held a little bit too high, a frame shot with an angle a little bit too low, and we would have gone completely off the rails as to our subject.

Cinematographer Noé Bach and I made radical choices as regards the frame, the light, and the colors. We all had a list of references, from religious painting to cinema, photography, or music videos. I wanted the light to be soaked, dense, contrasting, with bold colors. I wanted the image to combine neon and twilight, harshness, and delicacy. I wanted it contradictory, charged and bubbling. And above all, I wanted to celebrate so-called "bad taste" as something beautiful and moving. I kept repeating that phrase, coined by painter Martial Raysse: "Bad taste is wanting absolute beauty at all costs." Seeking absolute beauty is a naïve, romantic quest. There is nothing more authentic than artifice – it is profoundly human!

### **As for the editing, what kind of rhythm and pace were you looking for?**

The film is both naturalistic and highly pictorial. With the editor, Lila Desiles, we wanted to combine the urgency that drives Liane, the melancholic heaviness around her, and the iconic aspect of her dream. Liane is incandescent. She keeps moving forward, always one step ahead, forcing her way through closed passages and places whose access she's been denied. We needed to follow her heartbeat, but also to slip into her dreams and fascinations, so we had to take our time. Lengthy still shots, like gigantic paintings, or on the contrary, hand-held shots lasting only a few frames, allowed us to convey both the fascination and feverishness that are so typical of Liane.





## **How did you approach locations and set design – Fréjus, the house of Liane's mother, Dino's unfinished house, and that classic palace where time stands still?**

I went for images that didn't fit the usual codes associated with the Côte d'Azur. I didn't want to portray working class solely through a concrete housing estate, nor the picture-postcard images of a seaside resort. I wanted Liane to live in Fréjus, an extremely polarized town between Cannes and Marseille, with neither the glamour of the former nor the liveliness of the latter. In addition to its particular political and sociological background, Fréjus allowed us to make the most of totally opposite settings, from Americana to Italian *Dolce Vita*, by way of an English working-class town. Liane doesn't know where she belongs yet, she sets no limits for herself, and these contrasting settings allowed me to express just that.

Liane can hardly stand the spaces that make up her daily environment, such as the family home, the community center, or the beauty salon where she usually meets her friends. Their exact locations and layouts are never clearly depicted, so that we remain immersed in Liane's perceptions. In a way, since she despises these places, there is no reason to show them. Unlike the new places she is introduced to, that take her to a fantastic elsewhere.

The construction site and the classical palace are two different styles of dwellings that Dino offers Liane. The first is a raw, rough, and bare place, still under construction; it is Dino's idea of perfection, but a real turnoff for Liane. The second is lavishly ornate, breathtaking, the very picture of paradise in which Liane encounters another form of beauty, that of refinement, of art, of a delicate nature that awakens her senses – all things the young woman is denied access to because of her social background. But Liane doesn't care, she takes roots, takes her share, and feels all the feels. The expertise of Astrid Tonnellier and the whole set design team made these places look real and never fabricated.

## **And what about costumes?**

Exploring the question of beauty and body enhancement in the context of our film was exhilarating. I worked with Rachèle Raoult, who has a sharp and delicate understanding of clothes. Again, it was a challenge to show that what is "flashy and sexy" is actually beautiful and fragile. To show that what looks expensive, flashy, magnified, is only the expression of a profound need to be looked at and loved. Every detail has been carefully thought through to reflect what drives Liane. Fluffy, shimmering, or sultry materials, Fragonard prints, chains, lace, transparencies - all these exuberant details intended to celebrate extreme femininity, and systematically deemed trashy by self-righteous people, are cherished and highlighted.

The same questioning applied to hair and make-up, where I had to deconstruct "the done thing" to focus on authenticity and capture Liane's style and demeanor, without looking down on her. I wanted to go beyond common preconceptions: not to tell the story of beauty, but of the making of beauty. To show the body in all its rawness, to film the skin as truthfully as possible: suffocating under make-up, bruised by corsets and constrains, tattooed, muscled, faded, caressed, stirred. I wanted the audience to be able to smell the pungent smell of sweat and solvent, but also feel the awakening gentleness, and the frailty of budding love. Liane adorns herself with hair, nails, and make-up, but the awkward result says a lot about her urgency and vulnerability. Her hair extensions are poorly applied, her eyebrows are too dark and thick, her scars aren't concealed properly, her feet boasting varnished nails are in need of a pedicure, but this is precisely what I find beautiful and moving. Praising imperfection was truly liberating!



### **The soundtrack is very elaborate...**

As with the shots and the HMC (hair, make-up, costumes), I wanted to join opposites and play the overdose card. The deafening overdose versus the silent one. Everything in excess. When there is wind, we can really hear it. When the TV is on, there are also social network feeds spitting out their flood of content. When there are scooter engines, there is also the music that riders listen to on their cell phones. Layers and layers of sound, creating a magma that isn't always pleasant to hear, but that is real.

And in contrast, silence, which plays a big part in the film. The chilling silence of waiting, the silence of boredom, the silence of the seafront at night when bars are deserted, the silence of the kitchen except for the humming of the fridge, the silence of nature getting quiet when Liane sings, the silence of her fascination and meticulousness. These silences allowed us to emphasize Liane's breathing, which is very present in the film. I wanted her breath to be short. I wanted her to be always on the edge, breathless with her constant movements and vivid emotions.

### **Why did you choose the cello as main instrument?**

Right from the script, I wanted to separate the world around Liane and Liane's world through music. I wanted to contrast the syncs of the younger generation (rhythmic, autotuned, lascivious tunes, shifting from rap to reggaeton, hip hop to variety), with the absolute opposite - a music that would be Liane's voice.

With composer Audrey Ismaël, we knew right away that the cello would be Liane's instrument. The elasticity of its vibrations, ranging from the deepest to the celestial, allowed us to feel both her strength and her fragility. And we decided straightaway that there would only be one cello. Holding a whole film together with a single instrument is a real technical feat. It imposed a process that was out of control, provoking accidents, sharp turns, awkwardness. But it is precisely

because of this physical constraint that we were able to move away from mere illustration and best depict Liane's determination not to be like everyone else. Because Liane is all about the extreme and the absolute, and the absolute doesn't follow any predefined path. We wanted the music to break away from the image, to rise above it. To take us hostage like a loud scream.

### **Why this title?**

Initially, it was Dino who described Liane as a "Diamond in the rough." The phrase is suggestive of a yet unrevealed jewel that needs to be cut, which is what Liane does with herself, and what the viewers do as they gradually discover all her facets.





## AGATHE RIEDINGER

A graduate of the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs de Paris (ENSAD), Agathe Riedinger is a writer, director and photographer. She experiments with different types of narration, between excess and irony, sometimes deliberately vulgar or surreal, to question a certain vision of the world, and speak of themes dear to her heart, such as emancipation and the female condition. She directed the short films *J'attends Jupiter* and *Eve*, both of which were selected in numerous festivals. *Wild Diamond* is her first feature film.



# CAST

Liane  
Dino  
Sabine  
Alicia  
Nathan  
Stéphanie  
Carla  
Jessy  
Alexandra Ferrer

**MALOU KHEBIZI**  
**IDIR AZOUGLI**  
**ANDRÉA BESCOND**  
**ASHLEY ROMANO**  
**ALEXIS MANENTI**  
**KILIA FERNANE**  
**LÉA GORLA**  
**ALEXANDRA NOISIER**  
**ANTONIA BURESI**

# CREW

Screenwriter and director

Image

Editing

Music

Sound

Casting

Sets

Costumes

Make-up

Hair

1<sup>st</sup> assistant director

Continuity girl

Production manager

Music supervision

Executive producers

Line producer

**AGATHE RIEDINGER**

**NOÉ BACH**

**LILA DESILES**

**AUDREY ISMAËL**

**ROMAIN DE GUELTZL, ALEXANDRE HECKER, ALOYSE LAUNAY, MARC DOISNE**

**JULIE ALLIONE**

**ASTRID TONNELIER**

**RACHÈLE RAOULT**

**JULIA DIDIER**

**DELPHINE GIRAUD**

**LUCAS LOUBARESSE**

**LAURENCE NICOLI**

**SÉBASTIEN LEPINAY**

**JEANNE TRELLU and LUCAS DE MOIDREY (HIPPOCAMPUS SUPERVISION)**

**PRISCILLA BERTIN and JUDITH NORA**

**MARIE DAREL**

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