



Written by
S E Sheldon

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

Warm wind. A shining bright halo of sun. Nothing but blue skies.

A thatched cottage withers off a dirt road. Green wispy fields in all directions.

Wildflowers dot the landscape.

Definitely not modern-day. No lamp posts or telephone wires. Just an old European style cottage hidden away in the countryside.

Heavy worn boots wait at the edge of a rickety gate. They watch the still house. Nearly empty except...

A woman opens a window. A moment of fresh air. Sweat spritzes her face. A summer blush of heat on her cheeks.

This is ESMÉE, rural and windswept. The soft wrinkles and fading light of someone on the wrong side of 30.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - DAY

She tends a flower box at the window.

A bee lands among the petals. A bristle of hair on its tiny body. And she reaches for it, almost not sure what to expect. Pets it. Soft and delicate for a moment, but it STINGS her. And it hurts. The pain almost a surprise.

She smiles. Sucks on the swelling thumb.

And then she sees *him*. Standing outside her gate in those muddy boots. A tan military uniform--US infantry from WWII if you'd know how to spot it. He's covered in heavy gear. Holds an injured arm. This is WILLIAM (30), tired from tragedy and travel. A brittle soul desperate for only rest and respite.

WILLIAM

Miss, excuse me...

Her expression twists to anger. Fear. Suspicion.

She rushes from the bedroom.

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

He struggles with the gate. No luck. Hops it and hurries towards the house.

INT. COTTAGE, STAIRWELL/HALLWAY - DAY

She's swift down a thin creaking staircase.

Through a rural 1940s home. European in style and simplicity.

And to the front door. Open to let the breeze through.

She SLAMS it just as he gets to the entrance. He presses against it with a hurt arm. Shudders at the pain.

WILLIAM
Please, *mademoiselle*.

She locks it. Speaks in a heavy French accent:

ESMÉE
No.

He watches her. Puts his sweaty face to the glass. Handsome, but filthy. Mud caked on his skin and clothes.

WILLIAM
I didn't mean to intrude.

She closes the blinds on the door. Scampers through the house. He follows from outside. Window to window. Door to door. She's not scared, but not about to let this mouse in.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
I won't hurt you.

ESMÉE
Nor would I let you.

WHOOSH. Curtains close in his face.

WILLIAM
I just need a little water.

CLICK. Window locked.

ESMÉE
There is a fresh stream down the road.

SLAM. A window shuts.

WILLIAM
Maybe a little food.

ESMÉE
My pigs eat better than I do.

Curtains close in his face.

William spots a small stall in the backyard. A few chickens and pigs.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
I don't intend to butcher them. Nor should you.

He rushes around to the back of the cottage. To the last open door. He gets there before her. Stands in the way of it being shut. It should almost be intimidating. Almost...

ESMÉE (cont'd)
Excuse me.

William steps back. Heartbroken. Lets her close it.

WILLIAM
Maybe if I just stay in the pen with the pigs then. Just for the night?

Esmée stops. The door barely opens an inch. Considers it.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
I wouldn't butcher them. I promise-

He winces at some pain.

ESMÉE
You're hurt?

WILLIAM
Less than most.

She looks him over slowly. Takes in every detail.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
I know you've no right to trust me. But I promise that--

ESMÉE
--promises are neither necessary nor absolute. And a promise means nothing from a stranger.

He holds out a handshake for her. Eager to please.

WILLIAM
I don't have to be a stranger.

Esmée doesn't dare accept it.

ESMÉE

That is my choice to make, don't you think?

(a heavy moment)

But you can stay with the pigs. For one night.

WILLIAM

Thank you.

He leaves and heads for the pigsty. And she closes the door. Checks the locks.

Esmée peeks through the window. Daring another glimpse.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - DAY

She folds linens upstairs. Watches William in her backyard.

He catches her. And she glances away.

INT. COTTAGE - DUSK

It's getting dark. The surrounding fields alight with fire from the setting sunset. The greenery now gold and crimson.

Esmée cooks a meager dinner from rotting scraps.

She keeps an eye on William. He fumbles with sticks to build a fire by the pigsty.

EXT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

A squeak of a door. Gentle footsteps over soft summer grass.

She holds a plate of food. Not sure if she'll give it to him quite yet.

ESMÉE

Did you go to the river down the road for water?

WILLIAM

You know I didn't.

Esmée places the food on the ground near him. Careful not to get too close. She holds out a hand.

He goes to shake it, but she pulls back. Almost embarrassed.

ESMÉE
 Your canteen, please. I can fill it
 for you. Meager meals are best to
 wash down quickly.

WILLIAM
 (shrinks back)
 Of course.

William offers it to her. Rough fingers brush her palm.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
 My sincerest thanks, *mademoiselle*.

ESMÉE
 It is the least I can do.

She hurries back to the house.

INT. COTTAGE - DUSK

She fills the canteen at the sink. Runs her worn fingers
 across the tarnished metal. Across the etched name on the
 leather strap: "William".

Esmée watches him eat outside. Stares at him curiously.

EXT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

She brings out the sloshing canteen. Leaves it on the ground
 a few feet from him. *Won't get too close.*

ESMÉE
 Don't let the fire get too big.
 Someone will see.

He nods. Understanding. Respectful.

WILLIAM
 Of course, thank you again.

She heads back to the house. Locks the door behind her.

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

It's dark. Nearly pitch black. Esmée's bright eyes shine in
 the moonlight. She watches him from the doorway.

Lights a candle--a warm red glow.

Goes to the thin staircase. Tiptoes up to the rafters. And to the bedroom in the attic.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

She undresses slowly. Slips out of her summer dress.

EXT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

William stares at her from below. The tips of her bare shoulders dance in the candlelight.

And then it goes dark.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

She stands naked to the window. Invisible to him.

ESMÉE
Bonne nuit, William.

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

A pail of water splashes William's face. He jumps awake. Staggeres away from Esmée.

WILLIAM
What the fucking hell?

She goes to the pigs. Feeds them slop.

ESMÉE
It is late.

WILLIAM
How's that if I have nothing to be late to?

Esmée looks at the sun. Nearly mid-day.

ESMÉE
You are making me late. Come, stand. If you don't get up now, you might not get up again.

He wipes the water from his face. Confused.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
Your arm. Let me look at it.

WILLIAM

It doesn't hurt much anymore.

ESMÉE

That is worse. And I can smell it from here. Worse than the pigs. Come.

She goes to the garden. Sits at the stone ledge. Lays out a pail of water, sewing needle, and thread.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

It is easier to stitch an arm than dig a grave. And it is getting hot.
(motions for him to come)
Please?

He comes to her, careful to keep his distance. Lays his knapsack and weapons at the garden wall.

WILLIAM

I thought I was supposed to leave today? I don't intend to overstay my welcome.

ESMÉE

You didn't kill a pig. I can at least help you keep the arm. Will you sit?

He does. Far enough away from her to be polite and inconvenient.

She dips a white cloth into the water. Squeezes and kneads.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

I'll need to see it.

He hesitantly takes off his jacket. Unbuttons his shirt. But doesn't take it off. Just exposes a bandaged shoulder.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

I can wash those for you. Just leave them to the side.

He takes off the shirt. All blood and mud. Folds the clothes against the garden wall.

Esmée scoots to him along the stone. Careful to keep her distance. Softly peals the bandage from his arm.

William notices a deep rippling SCAR at her wrist. Fully healed, but definitely self-harm. *He won't acknowledge it, nor will she notice he's seen.*

He looks away from her. Modest and nonthreatening.

We won't see his injury, but her expression says enough.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
How did you get this?

WILLIAM
I suppose I went and got myself on
the wrong end of a gun.

He laughs.

ESMÉE
You joke about this?

WILLIAM
No, of course not. But you're not the
one with a hole in your arm.

She grabs his hand. Muddy, but uncharred.

ESMÉE
Gunpowder stains for days. Did you
not fight back?

He pulls his hand back from her.

WILLIAM
My gun jammed. I used my knife.

ESMÉE
You don't have to lie.

He unsheathes a KNIFE from his side.

She pulls back. Alarmed by the sudden weapon.

It's covered in dried blood. Crusty and red. He wipes it
clean. Lays it on his uniform. Turns away from her again.

WILLIAM
I'm sure you wouldn't understand.
There's no need to lie about such a
thing. No one cares if you kill one
of them or not. As long as you come
back standing.

She lets her harsh look calm. Squeezes the rag in the water
again. Runs it along his shoulder. He winces.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
Careful, please.

ESMÉE

I need to clean it well.

He tugs off his belt and secures it between his teeth.

She cleans it deeply. Takes tweezers to the flesh.

Once again. We don't see any of the carnage. Only their reactions. Only blood running down her fingers.

A twisted bullet CLINKS to the stone wall.

He gasps. Catches his breath. Yanks the belt from his mouth.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

You're lucky, it didn't hit anything.

WILLIAM

That's not how it felt.

ESMÉE

Superficial at best, I promise.

Esmée rinses the rag. Kneads it. Bloody water runs through. And she wets his shoulder again. Wipes at his muddy and sweaty skin.

Presses it to the wound.

WILLIAM

Mademoiselle, I--

He suddenly clutches her hand. Enough for her to startle. But he just holds her there. Closes his eyes.

William almost cries at the human touch. Vulnerable.

Caresses her fingers to his shoulder. Warm and alive. *It's been some time since either of them have felt this.*

A quiet moment.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

I'm sorry.

He drops her hand. The moment passes. Calms.

ESMÉE

(comforting)

Ça va...ça va.

Esmée cleans the blood from the rag again.

WILLIAM

I shouldn't have come. This was a mistake.

ESMÉE

Then you would have lost the arm.
It's good you came. I'm happy for it.

She hands him the leather for his teeth again. Picks up the needle and thread.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

This part will hurt more. Are you ready?

He pushes away the belt.

WILLIAM

Talk to me instead, please? Anything.

She knots the thread. Prepares to sew.

ESMÉE

Did you desert your post?

Esmée places a soft hand to his shoulder. Digs in with the needle. He shudders at the pain.

WILLIAM

(fighting through it)

Things are rarely that black and white.

ESMÉE

Fear is though. Running or fighting is.

She works quickly. He grimaces.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

So which is it?

A moment.

WILLIAM

I'm fast. Always have been. Ran track in high school. All-state.

ESMÉE

So you ran?

WILLIAM

I stayed alive.

ESMÉE

For anyone in particular?

WILLIAM

I--

He looks to her. But she presses his cheek away.

ESMÉE

Do not look. It will be harder.

His face contorts in pain. She digs in again.

WILLIAM

My mother I suppose. Or my brother.

ESMÉE

A brother may be happy to see you again. But if he knew you ran, he would not think so much of you.

WILLIAM

He doesn't have to know.

Esmée catches his eye.

ESMÉE

A mother though...she'd love you either way. Hold you tighter and count her stars for her child's safety.

WILLIAM

She could be dead and buried and still make it home for supper if her child were hungry. Strongest force in the world.

ESMÉE

That's why a mother would never run from battle. When someone realizes that they'll put them on the front lines. Never would a war be won so fast.

WILLIAM

Nor would the soldiers be so well fed or dressed.

ESMÉE

And those *Kraut* mothers may be even more dangerous. Best not let them figure it out first.

WILLIAM

Best not.

They share a smile. It doesn't last.

ESMÉE

So you're a deserter then?

She's harsher this time. Accusing. William stands. She grabs his arm. Stops him from going.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

Sorry. It is not my place to ask.

She pulls him back to her.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

Please, let me finish and then you can be on your way.

He sits back down. Closer this time.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

The fighting is not close, is it?

WILLIAM

Always closer than we'd like. Only four miles away.

ESMÉE

If it turns south the wind could bring it here.

She finishes the stitch. Wraps a clean bandage.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

This should hold for now. Just keep it dry.

WILLIAM

Thank you. And my mother thanks you. Not my brother though. Surely not him.

Esmée almost laughs. A shadow of a smile on her lips. She collects her tools. Grabs his clothes from the grass.

ESMÉE

I'll clean these and then you can be on your way.

She turns to go. Stops. Her back to him. Extends her open hand behind her. Keeps her eyes to the ground.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
 And your...*pantalon*? I can clean
 those as well.

WILLIAM
 Yes, of course.

He undresses. Hands his pants to her. Now down to his
 drawers. Neither make eye contact.

She goes to the house. Leaves the door open.

ESMÉE
 There is porridge in the kitchen if
 it suits you.

She goes inside to a washroom in the back. He watches her
 through the window flit about the house.

William leaves his knapsack behind. Goes to the house. Stops
 at the entry.

Esmée HUMS softly inside. Something old and melancholy.

He takes off his muddy boots. Leaves them at the door.

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

William tiptoes through the house. His thin moth ridden
 socks on splintered hardwood.

He passes by the washroom. She doesn't pay him any mind.
 Just cleans his clothes.

William wanders the small house. It's sparse and comforting.
 An old home once loved and lived in.

WILLIAM
 How do you know that I won't hurt
 you?

ESMÉE (O.S.)
 Will you?

WILLIAM
 Of course, not.

He runs his hand along the stone hearth. Admires the
 trinkets on the mantel.

ESMÉE
 How can I know?

WILLIAM
 Would you really have let me inside
 if you didn't already know what I am
 capable of?

He plucks a book from the shelf. Its worn edges and creased spine are dusty from age. But it is EMPTY when he opens it. The pages blank. *It's curious.*

ESMÉE (O.S.)
 (laughs)
 Maybe I keep you close so that you
 don't slit my throat in the night.

WILLIAM
 Are you saying I can stay another
 night?

William pulls another book from the shelf. And it's also empty. The words missing.

ESMÉE (O.S.)
 I said no such thing.

He puts the books back. Strays to the kitchen.

INT. COTTAGE, KITCHEN - DAY

William finds food at a little table waiting for him. Porridge. Water. Bread. It may as well be a feast.

He sits. Eats as fast as his bandaged arm will allow.

Also at the table, a single wildflower in a chipped glass. He touches it lightly.

WILLIAM
 (loud for her to hear)
 I've spotted these flowers all over
 the province. They're beautiful.

ESMÉE (O.S.)
 (right behind him)
 They would not survive outside the
 valley.

He turns, startled. And Esmée's right behind him in the doorway. She goes to the sink and cleans a dish.

ESMÉE
 Papa always said they needed the
 sweetest wines to grow.

WILLIAM
You have wine?

ESMÉE
None I would share with a stranger.
(she smiles)
Coffee?

WILLIAM
No, thank you.

ESMÉE
Good. I don't have any.

She takes a seat across from him.

WILLIAM
When do you think my clothes will be ready?

ESMÉE
Later.

WILLIAM
Will they dry before nightfall? I've already stayed too long.

ESMÉE
Yes, you have. But I can't predict the sun as you can't predict the moon. They'll be dry when they're dry. You shouldn't have slept in so late.

Esmée stands.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
Now if you'll excuse me.

She leaves out the back. A basket under her arm. Hangs up clothes on the line.

He slurps the last of the food. Watches her through the window. Esmée collects his knapsack and gun from the garden.

William rushes outside.

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

WILLIAM
What are you doing?

She puts them in a shed near the pigsty.

ESMÉE

These can not be out. Not with soldiers running around.

WILLIAM

You're locking away my things?

Esmée opens the door easily.

ESMÉE

Americans know how to use a door, yes?

WILLIAM

Yes I--

ESMÉE

Good. Then grab your things before nightfall.

She goes back to the house. LOCKS the door behind her. Leaves him outside.

INT. COTTAGE - LATER

Esmée writes a letter by a fire. Seals it. Licks it closed.

Outside, a SPLASH gets her attention.

William washes himself at a rusty water pump. She looks away. Gives him privacy.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - DUSK

Esmée waters the flowers at her window facing the backyard. William feels his clothes on the line. Still wet.

She goes to the front window. Green fields and trees in every direction.

Suddenly, ARTILLERY fire on the horizon. SMOKE. She drops the watering can. Rushes down the steps.

INT. COTTAGE - DUSK

William sprints towards the house. She unlocks the door for him. Let's him in.

ESMÉE

Se presser! Upstairs, NOW.

He listens. Rushes upstairs. She follows.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - DUSK

She tosses a closet. Pulls out linen pants and a shirt.

ESMÉE
Put these on.

Esmée runs back down the steps.

He watches her from the window.

She darts to the clothesline. Pulls his uniform down.
Hurries back inside.

INT. COTTAGE - DUSK

Esmée grabs his boots by the door. Closes and locks it
behind her.

She stuffs his things into a wooden chest. Covers them in
blankets.

Rushes up the steps to find...

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - DUSK

William dressed in the fresh clothes--a perfect fit.

More ARTILLERY FIRE on the horizon. They look to the window.

A palpable moment of foreboding.

Violence echoes just out of reach.

INT. COTTAGE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

They sit at the table in the kitchen. It's nearly pitch
black. An unlit candle between them. Bread and butter on an
untouched plate.

He reaches for matches at the base of the candle.

WILLIAM
May I?

She shakes her head.

Red FLARES over the hill. She shudders. Doesn't dare blink.

FIRE and SMOKE break the night sky just over Williams' shoulders. The light flashes in the room and across her face. Reveals a hint of a tear. He wipes it from her cheek.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
It will all end soon.

ESMÉE
How can you be so sure?

WILLIAM
I can only hope. There's no time or effort for anything else. So that has to be enough...sometimes.

ESMÉE
You're an optimist?

WILLIAM
No, just tired of the alternative.

She goes quiet.

William butters a piece of bread. Offers it to her. She shakes her head. More interested in watching the window.

He takes a soft bite.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
It's delicious. Did you make it or...

ESMÉE
The baker's dead. I made it. It is nothing special.

WILLIAM
It's the best thing I've eaten in a year.

William takes another bite. Smiles at her with a full mouth. Her focus moves to him, away from the window.

He offers her a piece again. Eager to distract.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
(joking)
Come on. I was slaving in the kitchen all day on this. Best thing you'll eat all year. Maybe nothing special 'cause the baker's dead. But it's better than the porridge.

She almost smiles. Almost forgets about the violence just across the valley. And she relents. Takes a bite.

He butters another piece for himself.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
Thank you for the clothes and the roof. You didn't have to help me.

He takes another bite. She watches him with newfound curiosity. He meets her gaze.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
These clothes...are they your husband's? They fit well.

Esmée breaks his gaze. Lightly touches the RING on her hand. He notices.

ESMÉE
(a whisper)
They were just...someones.

WILLIAM
Is he fighting?

ESMÉE
Not anymore.

WILLIAM
I didn't mean to pry. I'm sor--

She puts a finger to her lips. A silent *shhhhh*. And looks back to the window. More ARTILLERY and SMOKE on the horizon.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
You think they can hear us over their own death? Or even care?

William reaches across the table. She tries to pull back, but he's there faster. Squeezes her arm.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
They won't hurt you. I promise.

He stands. Offers her a hand.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
Come on. Let's get you to bed. You won't be able to hear them if you're asleep.

William leads her from the room.

She pulls away, almost. Barely. Not enough to make a difference. More confused than frightened.

ESMÉE

No I--

They go upstairs to the bedroom.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

ESMÉE

Who could sleep during a time like this?

She sits on the edge of the bed.

He sits at the opening to the stairs.

WILLIAM

You may if I promise to stay right here. I'll wake you if they get closer. I owe you at least a good night's sleep, right?

She nods.

ESMÉE

And then you'll leave?

WILLIAM

Yes. If that's what you want.

She closes her eyes. Listens to the artillery on the horizon.

He watches the stairs.

Both awake and in the dark.

ESMÉE

It is.

The moment sits.

A BANG outside. Close enough to echo. Far enough away for a veil of safety.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

The clothes were my brother's.

WILLIAM

Is he coming back?

ESMÉE

No one is coming back here. Dead or alive. Not really.

WILLIAM

Then you're alone?

She stares at him in the darkness.

ESMÉE

We should not spill too much wine over it. The dead can't taste it in their graves.

WILLIAM

I thought you didn't have any more wine?

William shares a smile with her in the moonlight.

ESMÉE

I am saving it for a special occasion.

WILLIAM

And if we don't live through the night?

ESMÉE

Then I'll drink it as my throat is slit.

WILLIAM

Must be good wine.

ESMÉE

It's the only one the wildflowers will drink.

A BANG. The glass on the windows rattle. The room ALIGHTS with a flash from outside.

WILLIAM

Should I fetch my gun from the shed? Just in case.

ESMÉE

It's not safe. Stay here for now. Just until I fall asleep, please?

WILLIAM

Of course.

The moment sits. Silence and moonlight.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - DAY

William wakes up on the floor at the top of the steps.

Sunlight bleeds through the curtains.

He stands. An uncomfortable restless sleep. Looks to the bed, but it's empty.

William goes to the front window. No sign of violence on the horizon. Just the rolling fields and wildflowers.

Out the back window, Esmée pulls his clothes from the line.

He strolls downstairs and outside to her.

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

ESMÉE

Thank you for keeping watch last night. It is the best I've slept since the war started.

WILLIAM

It was my pleasure.

ESMÉE

(with a smile)

I'm sure I would not have slept so soundly if I knew you were not awake.

WILLIAM

I didn't mean--

She whips the clothes to the wind. Clips it back to the line.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

I'm sorry.

ESMÉE

These will be dry in just a few hours. You want something to eat?

WILLIAM

I wouldn't want to inconvenience you any more than I already have.

ESMÉE

I was just going to make for myself. It's no trouble.

Esmée heads towards the house.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

Coming?

WILLIAM

I'll be right there.

She ducks inside. He watches her, just until she's gone from view. And he goes to the shed.

INT. SHED - DAY

It's dark and cobwebbed.

He digs through his knapsack. Checks something. Slips it in his pocket.

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

He leaves his knapsack and gun just outside the cottage door. Goes inside.

Esmée watches him, intrigued but knows better than to ask. She slips into the kitchen.

ESMÉE

Coffee?

He wanders inside. Just out of her view.

WILLIAM (O.S.)

Are you getting my hopes up?

ESMÉE

I have some now. I went into town this morning.

INT. COTTAGE, KITCHEN - DAY

She cooks at the stove. He comes up right behind her.

WILLIAM

Yes, I'd love some.

Esmée spins. Surprised he's so close.

ESMÉE

Sit. Sit. It will just be a moment.

He sits. She places coffee in front of him. Two cubes of sugar. A saucer of cream.

WILLIAM
Just how I like it. Thank you.

She sips her coffee, black.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
Any news from town?

ESMÉE
The fighting did not spread far.
Everyone heard it. No one slept well.

WILLIAM
Except you.

Esmée stifles a smile in her cup.

ESMÉE
Except me.

She goes back to the stove. Spoons porridge into bowls.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
It is not much...again.

WILLIAM
Better than the rations they gave us.

Esmée takes her seat. Spritzes her bowl with cinnamon. She offers him some:

ESMÉE
May I?
(he nods)
My mother made it like this.
(dusts his food)
Sweeter than sugar she'd say...but
only because we had no sugar.

She smells her bowl. Melts to it. Warm to the heart and soul. Pulls herself from some memory.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
How is your arm?

WILLIAM
Still there.

ESMÉE
Let us hope it stays that way.

They share a smile.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
Can I ask a favor?

WILLIAM
You don't have to ask. The answer's
yes.

ESMÉE
Can you stay one more night? Just
until I know the fighting has passed.

He's surprised. Tries to hide his pleasure. Takes a bite.

WILLIAM
That depends, of course.

ESMÉE
On?

WILLIAM
If we can bring out that wine.

EXT. COTTAGE - DUSK

They sip wine under a starry sky. Sit on a blanket.

ESMÉE
I don't believe you.

WILLIAM
(raises his hand)
Scouts honor.

ESMÉE
You lie. That cannot be what you miss
most.

WILLIAM
Well, what do you miss most?

ESMÉE
It is silly.

WILLIAM
Sillier than dancing?

ESMÉE
I suppose not.

WILLIAM
Come on, tell me.

ESMÉE

Chocolate.

WILLIAM

You could have anything in the world.
And that's what you choose?

ESMÉE

I don't want the whole world. Just my
small peace.

WILLIAM

That sounds lonely.

ESMÉE

It depends on the company.

William considers that. A sly smile spreading on his face.

WILLIAM

Chocolate you said? I may...

He pats his pocket. Thrilled. A hint of surprise.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

Wait. I might just--

She perks up. Moves close to him. He opens an empty pocket.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

Must have just eaten it this morning.
I'm so sorry.

Esmée slaps his shoulder.

ESMÉE

That is not kind.

WILLIAM

Ow. You started it!

ESMÉE

You get no more of this.

She swipes the bottle from his hand. Takes a big swig. Sweet
red wine runs down her chin. He wipes it with his sleeve.

WILLIAM

No wine, chocolate, or dancing. Why
am I even still in France?

ESMÉE

Silly, just as I said.

WILLIAM
I was just being honest.

ESMÉE
No, but I don't accept it. It cannot be what you miss most. You can dance whenever you want. A war doesn't stop that.

WILLIAM
You want me dancing among the bullets...

William stands. Flits around her on the grass. Mimicking a dance. Careful to dodge invisible bullets whizzing past.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
...a corporal as my partner?

She laughs.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
But dancing without music isn't much dancing at all. Unless you'd like to disagree about that too?

He takes the wine from her. She pouts.

ESMÉE
I miss music too. Music and chocolate.

WILLIAM
But not dancing? Come on stand.

William offers her a hand.

ESMÉE
Greater men have failed in better times. Only my Papa could ever get me to dance.

He likes that challenge.

WILLIAM
After the war then?

She stands. Shakes his hand--doesn't let go.

ESMÉE
I've made worse promises on less. So we both survive with our heads on and I'll give you a proper dance. I'll even bring the chocolate and wine.

WILLIAM
I can't say no to that.

She nods. Pulls her hand back.

ESMÉE
It is a deal then.

A shared smile. But it's shattered by ARTILLERY off in the distance.

WILLIAM
They're close. Please, you must go.

She grabs him.

ESMÉE
Come.

And they rush for the house.

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

William checks his gun. She locks the door behind them.

Esmée moves to blow out the candles.

WILLIAM
Leave those on. If anyone's coming in here, I'd rather have the light to shoot with.

He shuts the curtains tight. Watches heavy fire on the horizon. Far away but close enough to scare.

ESMÉE
It is not safe.

WILLIAM
Let me decide that for us.

William offers her his knife, but she won't take it. He forces it in her palm. Closes her fingers around the handle.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
Have you used one before?

She pulls her sleeve over the scar at her wrist. *He doesn't acknowledge it.*

ESMÉE
Only on the pigs.

WILLIAM

It's much of the same. But it shouldn't come to that. Stay behind me and I'll protect you.

William cleans the gun on the table.

ESMÉE

And to what end? If they get in here we're dead.

He pauses. A smile creeps to his lips. *He likes that fire.*

WILLIAM

I agree. They'll come right through these doors and we'll hide or fight. It really doesn't matter because the result will be the same. Won't it?

(she doesn't understand)

Either dead or victorious. Our war may as well be over now.

She crosses her arms. Bothered by his foolery.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

Your debt is due.

ESMÉE

What are you talking about?

WILLIAM

We made an agreement. So why not have that one more dance before we go.

He drops his gun on the table. Goes to a dusty record player in the corner.

ESMÉE

You can't. They may hear.

William plays something old and melancholy. Lowers the volume to barely a whisper.

WILLIAM

Only the floorboards will hear, I promise.

ARTILLERY in the distance. It echoes in the house.

He offers her a hand.

ESMÉE

You've made promises before...

WILLIAM

I only stayed because you asked.

Esmée accepts his hand. Hesitant and vulnerable. He delicately uncurls the knife from her fingers.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

You won't need that anymore.

And he moves close to her. Presses her body to his. Close enough to share a breath.

ESMÉE

It is too quiet. I thought you couldn't dance without music.

WILLIAM

You don't hear it?

He whispers to her ear.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

1...

EXPLOSIONS nearby.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

2...

A BOOM of bullets.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

3...

...and they dance. Careful at first. Fragile and soft as he pulls her with him. Tiptoeing along the floorboards.

Sweeping into an enraptured dance as they drift through the house.

No words needed.

Artillery woven to the music. *We hear it and they hear it. But the rest of the world will never know.*

Just the silent crescendo.

Just being together until the music calms and quiets.

And they crash to the floor. Hushed laughter and smiles.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

Could you hear the music?

ESMÉE
Oui.

WILLIAM
 Yes?

ESMÉE
Oui. Oui. Je le sens à travers toi.

He shakes his head. Not understanding.

WILLIAM
 (mimicking, tries to understand)
Oui. Je la...vers toi?

ESMÉE
 Yes.

She stifles a smile.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
Je...

Takes William's hand. Holds it to her chest. Feels every ounce of his flesh and soul.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
 I...

WILLIAM
 (copying)
Je...

She points to the record player.

ESMÉE
le sens à...

WILLIAM
 (copying)
le sens à...

Esmée nods.

ESMÉE
 feel the music...

She puts a hand to his chest. And one to his cheek. He melts to the touch.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
travers toi.

WILLIAM
 (copying)
travers toi.

ESMÉE
 through you.

He smiles. Understanding.

And he runs his fingers along the outlines of her face.

Her neck. Her hair.

WILLIAM
 I don't want to hurt you.

Her eyes.

ESMÉE
 You cannot.

Cheeks.

WILLIAM
 I only want...

Lips.

ESMÉE
 I know.

He pulls her close. Kisses her passionately. *Can't breathe. Can't think. Can't be anything but here and now.*

Artillery nearby echoes with another crescendo of silent music. *But they no longer seem to notice or care.*

ESMÉE (cont'd)
 Wait...

She retreats for air. Breathless.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
 I danced. Where's my wine and chocolate?

William checks his pocket for chocolate.

WILLIAM
 I...I--I'm empty handed. Except...

He jumps up. Unlocks the back door. Rushes outside across the dark lawn.

EXT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Grabs the bottle of wine left on the grass. Runs inside.

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

She giggles.

WILLIAM
Sweeter the better.

ESMÉE
That's my wine and it doesn't count.

William takes a swig. Offers it to her. And she gives in.
Sips it.

He goes to his knapsack. Checks a pocket. Pulls out a thin
piece of wrapped tin foil. It shines in the candlelight.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
What do you have?

William unpeels it carefully. Her eyes go wide.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
Is that...

WILLIAM
It's not much or very good. I was
saving it.

ESMÉE
I--I can't take that.

He breaks a piece of chocolate. Offers it to her.

Esmée melts with a bite. Crumbling and sweet.

WILLIAM
Good?

She nods. Tears in her eyes.

William offers her the rest of the treat and sips the wine.
Watches her indulge herself. Enjoying her pure bliss.

And then a LOUD BANG. Closer than it should be. It shakes
the house.

They jump up. In sync:

Turn off the soft music.

Grab the gun.

Blow out the candles.

Pure darkness and...

SHATTER. CRUNCH.

Esmée steps on the wine bottle. It breaks under her foot.

William grabs her from behind. Covers her mouth. Silences a scream.

She crumples to the floor.

The whole house echoes with her hushed cries.

A glass SHARD sticks out of her foot.

William doesn't let her scream. Holds her taught. Cradles her as the battle swells and falls.

He pulls her underneath the table for cover as the house shakes under the force of artillery nearby.

A BRIGHT LIGHT of an EXPLOSION somewhere outside. It casts brilliant red shadows across the room.

And just as soon as it started, the fighting slows. The small cottage is draped back in darkness.

William crawls to the window. Peeks outside the curtain.

It's quiet. Still.

He picks her up. Cradles her in his arms. And carries her up the stairs.

ESMÉE

(whispers)

It hurts.

WILLIAM

What did you expect?

ESMÉE

William, make it stop.

WILLIAM

Shhh. We must stay quiet.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

He lays her on the bed. Heads for the steps--

ESMÉE
Please don't leave me.

She grabs his hand. And he stops.

WILLIAM
I'll be right back. I promise.

The violence nearby pulses and echoes in the night.

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

William grabs his gun. Fills a pail of water in the kitchen. Looks for a rag. Nothing.

Takes off his shirt. Only in his tank top with the bloody bandages on his shoulder.

He touches his arm softly. Just at the wrappings. Winces at the pain of his still fresh injury.

And he unwraps the bandages to see...*nothing*. Perfect flesh. Unbroken. Unbloodied. Unscarred.

ESMÉE (O.S.)
William?

William quickly wraps his arm back up. Hurries upstairs.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Esmée sits up in bed as he comes in.

ESMÉE
I think they've gone.

WILLIAM
No. I don't believe so.

Faint footsteps and muffled voices somewhere nearby.

He lifts her foot. Elevates it with pillows.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
This will hurt, but you must stay quiet.

She closes her eyes. Covers her mouth.

ESMÉE
Just do it quick--

He yanks the shard from her foot. Esmée shudders a scream.

William rinses her foot with the pail. Trickle diluted blood to the floorboards.

Esmée reaches for him and he holds her. Tightly wraps her foot in his shirt to stop the bleeding. She squeezes his hand. A whisper of a kiss.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
Is it done?

WILLIAM
For now.

William sits at the foot of the bed. Sweat beads on her face. Barely through the pain of it--*and she knows that.*

ESMÉE
Can you not leave tomorrow?

He lays down in bed beside her. The gun at his side. Both stare at the ceiling.

WILLIAM
I wouldn't dream of it.

She weaves into unconsciousness. Barely awake.

ESMÉE
(in French, English subtitled)
We never have to leave.

He watches her eyes flutter closed. Asleep. Peaceful.

WILLIAM
(in French, English subtitled)
One day we will.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - DAY

Esmée wakes to a blinding LIGHT from...

the window. A warm morning. Flecks of dust drift in the sun's early rays. She reaches in the bed beside her, but it's empty.

And Esmée's alone.

She tries to stand. Stifles a cry from the pain.

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

Esmée limps down the stairs. Tries not to put any weight on her foot. Struggles.

ESMÉE

William?

His head pops out from the kitchen.

WILLIAM

You shouldn't be up and walking.

She makes it down the steps. Barely. Just in time for him to sweep her up in his arms.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

I got you.

She's surprised. Quite taken by it. By him.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

You should be careful.

INT. COTTAGE, KITCHEN - DAY

He pulls out the chair. Helps her sit at the table.

WILLIAM

They've all gone I think. It's been quiet for hours.

ESMÉE

And you?

William goes to a smoking pot at the stove.

WILLIAM

Unskilled at making porridge quite as well as you do.

He spoons dark lumpy globs into a bowl in front of her. Pours clumps of cinnamon on top.

ESMÉE

I meant...are you leaving too?

William sits across from her. Pours a cup of coffee. Black. Just the way she likes it.

WILLIAM
When you're back up on your feet, yes.
Not before. Unless you want me to.

ESMÉE
I don't, but--no. I'd like that.
Thank you.

WILLIAM
It's the least I can do. You've been
so generous with your home. And your
food...and wine.

He gives her the hint of a smile. She blushes.

William spoons porridge into his own bowl.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
It's supposed to be this color,
right?

She pokes at her bowl.

ESMÉE
It's just how my Papa made it.
Brûlé et noir.

WILLIAM
Brule is good? Like the dessert?

She nods. Giggles. Taps at a hard chunk in the food.

ESMÉE
Brûlé...burnt to perfection.

He takes a bite. Grimaces at the taste and texture.

WILLIAM
I see what you mean.

She takes another bite.

ESMÉE
Perfection.

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

Esmée digs in the garden. Working on her hands and knees. Wrestles carrots from the dirt. Covered in mud.

She looks up to the roof. Watches William patching a hole in the thatch. Almost smiles. Goes back to her task.

William glances down at her. *Happy and at peace in this strange new something.* Wipes sweat from his face.

He goes back to his work, but something catches his eye on the horizon. A trick of light or...*nothing really.* Just fields and birds and wildflowers.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Esmée leans on William as they amble through a forest. Thin saplings just starting to bud. Blue skies above.

He's careful with her. Gentle.

Their soft laughter drifts through the trees.

WILLIAM
We shouldn't go too far.

ESMÉE
Can you not keep up?

WILLIAM
I didn't say that.

ESMÉE
Come. Let's race back to the house.

He looks at her bandaged foot. Laughs.

WILLIAM
I don't think my honor could handle it if you beat me there.

ESMÉE
That is what I thought.

He lifts her over a broken log and they share a long look. *Almost a moment here...if either of them will allow.*

An ENGINE REVS in the distance.

William grabs Esmée and pulls her to a tree. Presses her to the trunk and searches the skies.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
What's wrong?

He hoists her to the first branch.

WILLIAM
Come, quickly now.

She listens. Gets up with some difficulty. He helps. Climbs up beside her.

ESMÉE
William?

WILLIAM
(points to the sky)
Look!

An engine burns louder and slices through the air. A silver metal Focke-Wulf GERMAN PLANE flies low above them. It scours the countryside.

She peeks beyond the branches for a better look, but he pulls her back.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
They must not see us.

Silence returns.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
Let's stay here awhile until they've passed.

Esmée nods. Plays with the ring on her finger. A nervous compulsion. William notices.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
Was he in the war?

ESMÉE
For awhile.

He searches her gaze.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
Before he left...he plucked as many wildflowers as his arms could carry and more. Papa was furious.
(mimicking a French man's voice)
May as well have burned down the barn to show his *l'amour*.
(back to her voice)
But I kept every one. Planted them myself in the garden. Spread their petals for our wedding. Pressed their leaves for our son Thomas'...

She stops short. Her smile fades and falters.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
I'm sorry. I shouldn't have brought
that up.

He places a comforting hand on her shoulder.

WILLIAM
Did you love your husband?

Esmée turns to him sharply. Confused.

ESMÉE
Of course. For as long as we had.

WILLIAM
And what happened to him?

ESMÉE
That's a sad story. And not worth any
more tears.

She turns away from him. Brushes a tear from her pooling
eyes. *Careful not to let William see.*

The moment sits.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
Did you have...someone?

WILLIAM
Yes, I "had someone".

ESMÉE
And?

WILLIAM
People make their own choices. No
matter the cause of pain or fault...
one person still chooses an end. And
it wasn't me.

That hurts. That's something to both of them.

ESMÉE
Can you tell me about her?

William lightly tucks her hair behind her ear.

WILLIAM
Her hair was like chocolate. Lips like
wine. And she was happy...for a while.

He goes quiet. Sad.

ESMÉE
What are your wildflowers?

WILLIAM
Nothing...in particular. No grand
gesture. But everything...in its own
way I suppose.

She turns to him with a soft smile.

ESMÉE
That's nice.

WILLIAM
Well, it's no burned barn.

ESMÉE
Come on, tell me something else about
her. Anything, please.

William stares at Esmée deeply. She leans to him. Waits
desperately for him to speak.

WILLIAM
It doesn't matter.

He runs his finger over her jaw. Traces every perfect
detail. Her eyes close. *Their breath slowing to nothing but
heartbeats.*

ESMÉE
(whispers)
But it does...matter.

An engine ROARS overhead and another German plane flies
above them. Their eyes shoot to the sky.

Esmée clutches William as the tree shakes beneath them. They
duck out of view and into the branches.

Two more engines REV over the horizon.

WILLIAM
You hear that?

ESMÉE
Are there more?

He smiles. Nods. Watches two Mosquito ENGLISH PLANES chase
closely behind the German plane.

William WHOOPS and HOLLERS. Jumps down from the tree.
Follows them across the sky as they shrink to the horizon.

WILLIAM
Did you see them?

ESMÉE
What does it mean?

He helps her down from the branches.

WILLIAM
The British are pushing back. It
means the world is a little safer
than yesterday.

She watches the plane and glances to William--not able to
hide his excitement.

ESMÉE
Not for a deserter. They may come
looking for you soon.

WILLIAM
No one will take me away.

ESMÉE
You may choose to leave.

WILLIAM
I promised you I wouldn't.

He pulls her close. Kisses her forehead. But his focus is on
the planes on the horizon.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
This is good news. I assure you.

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

They play a game of cards in the warm glow of the hearth.

ESMÉE
It's quiet tonight...safe.

WILLIAM
How would you say that? "Safe".

ESMÉE
Sûre.

He plays with it on his lips.

WILLIAM

Sûrriie.

ESMÉE

(bad American accent)

You make it sound like "Baseball" and
"Brooklyn".

WILLIAM

It's not so bad.

She laughs.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

(struggling with French)

Tu es sûre.

Esmée looks over her deck of cards. Surprised. Amused.

ESMÉE

You're learning.

WILLIAM

Well, it's better than your baseball
and Brooklyn accent.

ESMÉE

Both are better than your porridge.

WILLIAM

I thought you liked the *brûlé*?

She leans over the table to him. Blushes in the firelight.
The wood table creaks beneath her.

ESMÉE

I...

His breath catches in his throat. And he comes closer.

WILLIAM

Yes?

Esmée brushes her lips to his delicately. Almost a kiss.

ESMÉE

I loved it.

William closes his eyes, falls into this. And she presses
down on his cards. Peeks at them. Sits back in her chair.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

The best I've ever had.

She looks at her own cards. Strategically places two on the table. His eyes shoot open.

WILLIAM

Hey. You cheated!

ESMÉE

There's no cheating at cards. Only what you can get away with.

He huffs. A smile. More thrilled than upset. Turns all his cards over on the table. *She's won that round.*

Esmée moves to collect them. He grabs her hand. Holds it taught with a sly smile. A stalemate.

WILLIAM

And what can you get away with?

William runs a finger over her hand slowly. Turns her skin over in his. *Careful to not acknowledge that self-harm scar on her wrist.*

He traces up and down her palm. So softly it tickles.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

You can only cheat the same way once.

ESMÉE

Good that I have many other ways then.

Esmée winks. She's won again. *Always will.* He drops her hand. And she slides the cards back. Takes her prize. Deals out the next round.

WILLIAM

Do you have any more wine hidden in the floorboards?

They look at their cards. She glances over her hand. A flirt in her eyes.

ESMÉE

Only for special occasions.

WILLIAM

And when will that be?

ESMÉE

When the war is over.

He takes a foil-wrapped square of chocolate and places it on the table between them.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
 I thought you were out?
 (he shrugs)
 You want to trade?

WILLIAM
 A bet on the next round. No cheating.

ESMÉE
 (gasps sarcastically)
 I would never. *Cochon américain, comment osez-vous.*

WILLIAM
 I'll take that as a yes?

She looks at her cards again.

ESMÉE
 You have a deal.

He offers her a hand to shake. *She won't take that bait.*

ESMÉE (cont'd)
 Ahh, I thought you said no cheating?

WILLIAM
 I said you couldn't.

ESMÉE
 (laughs)
 Let me get the wine.

Esmée moves to get up. And he's at her side immediately. Helps her up. Doesn't let her bandaged foot touch the floor.

WILLIAM
 You must be careful.

They're close. Very close.

ESMÉE
 I'm fine. I can manage.

WILLIAM
 Please, let me...

And he pulls Esmée closer. Supports every ounce of her. Pressing her body to his.

She reaches delicately for his shoulder. Runs her hand along the bandage. *A familiar touch.*

ESMÉE
How is your wound?

He takes her hand. Intertwines her fingers with his.

WILLIAM
Fine.

She playfully pulls at the stray thread of the wrapping.

ESMÉE
You sure?

He pulls her hand off him. Withdraws before she can undo the bandage. Distant now. A moment gone.

WILLIAM
I said it's fine. Healing well.

ESMÉE
(surprised, hurt)
Good.

WILLIAM
You should worry about yourself.
You're the one that's injured.

William steps away from her. Cleans up the cards at the table. The room turns cold.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
Maybe it's too late for wine and cards. How about tomorrow?

She gets the hint. Feigns a yawn.

ESMÉE
Yes, tomorrow.

He lays a blanket on the wood floor. Grabs a pillow near the hearth. She notices. Feels that.

WILLIAM
Let me help you to bed.

ESMÉE
No.

He retreats.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
I can manage.

She limps to the steps.

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

William cleans up the pigpen. Struggles to control the animals.

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

Esmée watches William outside.

Picks up his makeshift bed on the floor near the hearth.

Tucked under the blanket is a single wooden crutch. Worn, but usable.

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

She limps towards the shed with the crutch. Careful not to put pressure on her foot.

William spots her from the garden. Hurries to her side.

WILLIAM

I meant to surprise you at supper. I found that in the shed.

ESMÉE

You meant to have me hobble about for a whole day without it first?

WILLIAM

No...I--I didn't mean that.

She passes him. Keeps on her way.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

Can I help you with anything?

ESMÉE

No, thank you. I'm capable.

INT. SHED - DAY

All cobwebs and dust. Someone's old and fragile memories in here. *But they seem unfamiliar to her.*

She moves a portrait of an old man. Behind it, crates of wine. Two dozen bottles.

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

She shuts the shed behind her. Struggles to the house with the crate of wine under one arm.

He hurries to her side.

WILLIAM
I'm not sure I have enough chocolate
to bet for that.

ESMÉE
This isn't for you.

WILLIAM
Are you sure I can't help you back to
the house?

ESMÉE
(upset, stubborn)
Je vais bien. Je vais bien.

Esmée pushes past him. Nearly drops the crate.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
(frustrated)
*Allez finir votre travail avec les
cochons.*

WILLIAM
I...I don't understand.

She points to the pigpen.

ESMÉE
The pigs!

William turns to see the pigpen wide open and the animals escaping.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
Les cochons!

He runs to herd them back into the pen.

Esmée drops the wine to the ground. Limpes after him to corral the animals.

EXT. COTTAGE - LATER

William chases one last pig around the property. Together they herd it into the pen.

They laugh. A soft look before she turns cold again. He moves to pick up the crate of wine.

WILLIAM
Please, let me--

Esmée grabs it before he can. Heads for the house.

ESMÉE
I said I'm fine.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - DAY

Esmée's curled in bed. Stares at the wall beside her. *Lost somewhere we could only dream about.*

WILLIAM (O.S.)
Are you sure you're feeling alright?
I can call the doctor.

William hovers at the staircase. Doesn't dare get too close.

ESMÉE
It'll pass soon. It always does.

WILLIAM
Esmée, I--

ESMÉE
It'll be good to get off my foot
too...so it properly heals.

WILLIAM
I won't be far if you need anything.

She doesn't take her eyes from the wall. Pulls the blanket close.

He lingers.

And she waits.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
Just rest for now.

William leaves down the steps. She flinches as the door shuts.

INT. COTTAGE - LATER

Esmée wakes suddenly. Looks around the empty room. Not sure what's woken her.

She goes to the window. Searches the horizon. But it seems empty. Bare. Safe. *She's almost disappointed.*

There's a CLATTER from downstairs.

ESMÉE

William?

No answer.

She tiptoes to the steps. Quietly makes her way downstairs with her crutch.

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

It seems empty, except--

Another CLATTER from the kitchen.

INT. COTTAGE, KITCHEN - DAY

Esmée peeks inside. There's a man with his back to her. He wears a familiar tan US infantry uniform.

He turns with a smile. This is the CORPORAL (60s). Stout and intellectual with pepper-gray hair and wire-rim glasses.

CORPORAL

Pardon, *mademoiselle*. Your door was open.

She looks to the door. It's closed and locked.

ESMÉE

You should not be here.

He nods. Strolls the kitchen.

CORPORAL

Is your husband home, *mademoiselle*?

ESMÉE

I live alone.

The Corporal takes a seat at the table. Taps his finger on one of the TWO cups.

CORPORAL

That sounds dangerous in a place like this for a woman like you.

ESMÉE
I don't take threats lightly.

CORPORAL
Good.

He approaches her. Esmée doesn't flinch. Doesn't blink.

CORPORAL (cont'd)
You can never be too careful. It's
not safe out there.

She trembles, but stands her ground. He notices the crutch
and bandaged foot.

CORPORAL (cont'd)
Mademoiselle...

He gets too close. Takes her hand in his. Blatantly looks at
the deep scars on her wrist.

CORPORAL (cont'd)
...if you need help. You only have to
ask.

She's silent and stone.

ESMÉE
You should not be here.

CORPORAL
You mean without your husband?

ESMÉE
I told you, I live alone.

He notices the wedding band on her finger. Steps back. Gives
her a moment to breathe.

CORPORAL
I can just speak with you for now. Is
that okay?

Esmée nods.

CORPORAL (cont'd)
You've heard the war raging close?

ESMÉE
Yes.

CORPORAL
But you stayed?

ESMÉE

Yes. This is my home.

CORPORAL

There are soldiers hiding in the countryside. Have you seen any?

ESMÉE

No.

CORPORAL

They are deserters and dangerous. You should come with me and I can take you somewhere safe.

ESMÉE

No.

CORPORAL

No? No they are unsafe or no they are not deserters?

ESMÉE

No, I will not leave with you.

CORPORAL

I'm sure your husband would like you to reconsider.

ESMÉE

I'm not sure who you're referring to.

He smiles, all teeth. Frustrated at the lack of honesty.

CORPORAL

I implore you to reconsider, Esmée. I wouldn't want something to happen to you here that you can't come back from.

She spots William's knapsack in the corner. His knife beside it. She shifts her gaze, but it's too late. The Corporal has already seen it.

CORPORAL (cont'd)

Don't you even--

Esmée rushes for it.

He charges her. Yanks her back just in time.

She CRACKS him across the head with the crutch. Crawls for the knife.

They wrestle for it.

CORPORAL (cont'd)
Stop this NOW. You're going to
regret--

And SLINK. The knife slices into his stomach.

CORPORAL (cont'd)
You...

He gasps through the pain. Blood bubbles to his lips.

Esmée scrambles away. Her hands stained with blood. *We won't see his wound, but his face says quite enough--he won't make it through this.*

CORPORAL (cont'd)
I tried...to help you.

He crawls for the door. Painful and slow.

Dragging himself away.

Scratching across the hardwood.

PRELAP: Rough hands claw at something organic.

EXT. GARDEN - DUSK

Esmée scrapes at the dirt in the garden. Covering in a freshly dug hole.

Sweat beads her face. She shakes. Trembles.

Her muddy and bloody hands dig until--

WILLIAM (O.S.)
Are you feeling better?

Esmée spins. Startled and afraid.

ESMÉE
Merde!

WILLIAM
I didn't mean to startle you.

She struggles to stand. Brushes the dirt off her hands.

He comes close.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
I'm happy to see you're out of bed.

She pushes him away from her. Upset and shaken.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
What was that for?

ESMÉE
You scared me.

WILLIAM
Apologies. I didn't mean to.

ESMÉE
Didn't your mother ever tell you to
walk louder than a mouse or get
stepped on?

He chuckles.

WILLIAM
No, haven't heard that one before.

She looks him over.

ESMÉE
You're filthy.

WILLIAM
(re: her dirty clothes)
Have you looked in the mirror?

ESMÉE
Is there something you'd like to say?

WILLIAM
Nothing. Never.

He smiles. And she can't help but return it. Cleans her hands at the water pump.

ESMÉE
I won't have you wearing that inside.

She pulls a fresh pair of clothes from the line. Tosses them to him.

WILLIAM
Thank you.

William dresses. She turns to give him privacy.

ESMÉE

Where were you when I woke?

An uncertain pause.

WILLIAM

I went to fetch the doctor.

ESMÉE

I told you I was fine.

WILLIAM

I was just concerned. Let's consider it done. I won't mention it again.

He buttons the clean shirt. Watches the light setting over the valley.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

The horizon's clear.

ESMÉE

And the fighting?

WILLIAM

It was quiet last night.

ESMÉE

I didn't hear anything either.

WILLIAM

Nor will you hear anything tonight. I think it's passed the valley.

Esmée nods.

ESMÉE

They must have left. But I'd still feel safer if you slept upstairs tonight.

She turns to him. He buttons the fresh pair of pants.

WILLIAM

I...

ESMÉE

--only if there's more fighting, of course.

WILLIAM

Yes, of course. I'll come up if there's more fighting.

Esmée limps to the house.

ESMÉE

We just have soup for dinner. I hope that's okay.

He sweeps his arm beneath her. Helps her towards home.

WILLIAM

I hope you're okay with just my company.

ESMÉE

(a smile)

Do I have any other options?

INT. COTTAGE, KITCHEN - DUSK

William helps her to the table. Goes to the stove. Mixes the pot of soup.

ESMÉE

You didn't have to do that.

He waves it off. Spots an unfamiliar red STAIN on the floor where the Corporal bled out. Takes it in, but looks away.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

I'm plenty--

WILLIAM

--capable...right. Right. I know.

ESMÉE

That's not what I was going to say.

He gives her a look. *She was definitely going to say that.*

William turns back to the soup.

WILLIAM

Did you make this from the vegetables in the garden?

ESMÉE

Yes, I rooted some plants. They were strangling the tomatoes. I needed to make some room for the next season.

WILLIAM

Good for us, bad for the tomatoes then.

He stirs the broth.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
So the Doctor never came?

ESMÉE
I thought we weren't going to discuss
it.

WILLIAM
You're right.
(re: the soup)
Is it done?

ESMÉE
Yes, I believe so.

He searches the cabinets.

WILLIAM
Bowls?

Esmée moves to stand.

ESMÉE
It's--

He presses a heavy hand to her shoulder. Keeps her sitting.

WILLIAM
No need. Just point. Let me help.

She's more stubborn than appreciative. Points to a cupboard.
He grabs two bowls. Fills and places them on the table.

William digs into his food. Eager to eat.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
So are you feeling better then?

ESMÉE
I can take care of myself if that's
what you're implying. I always have.

Esmée crosses her arms, not touching the food. *He won't take that bait.* He just keeps eating.

WILLIAM
This is my favorite. How did you know?

ESMÉE
I just threw it together.

WILLIAM
 Well, it's perfect.
 (a large spoonful)
 What's this...a carrot?

William holds up a vegetable from the soup.

ESMÉE
 A potato.

He considers it seriously. Sneaks one last glance to the blood stain on the ground.

WILLIAM
 Well, this horrible potato is the best carrot I've ever eaten.

Almost a smile from her. William reaches for her full untouched bowl.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
 Are you going to eat that or--

She slaps his hand away with a smirk.

ESMÉE
 No, thank you. I'll eat.

He pushes a spoon towards her and she takes it.

WILLIAM
 I've been sweatin' over the stove all day. No bread 'cause the baker's still dead. But we made do.

Esmée takes a sip. Glances at him over her dinner.

ESMÉE
 (copying him)
 We make do.

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Warm firelight from candles. Soft music from the record player. Esmée sets up cards at the table.

William tends to the hearth.

WILLIAM
 I meant to ask, have you seen my knife?

Esmée freezes. Stops dealing for a moment.

ESMÉE
No, is it missing?

WILLIAM
I must have misplaced it.

She continues. William drifts along the trinkets and shelves.

ESMÉE
Good thing that there hasn't been more
fighting or soldiers nearby then.

He's about to pull a book from the shelf when--

ESMÉE (cont'd)
Ready?

William takes his seat. They sip wine from the same bottle.

WILLIAM
No cheating tonight?

She looks at her cards. Smirks. Flips them onto the table.

ESMÉE
I won't have to.

He drinks a big gulp of wine.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
The wine's on my side.

WILLIAM
(takes another drink)
We'll see.

He flips his cards to the table. She's more than a little surprised. Playfully upset.

ESMÉE
Merde.

WILLIAM
I don't think I need you to translate
that one for me.

They share a smile. Play another hand.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
So...when you went to town a couple
days ago, how was it?

ESMÉE

Fairly quiet. Empty. With the fighting so close, everyone is scared.

(beat)

But I thought you went to town to fetch the Doctor?

WILLIAM

No--no I never made it. Must've gotten turned around. A villager said they would fetch him for me.

ESMÉE

Who was that?

WILLIAM

Hmm?

ESMÉE

The villager?

WILLIAM

I didn't catch the boy's name.

(changing the topic)

Were there soldiers there...in town?

ESMÉE

A few Americans. That's all.

He nods. Looks at his cards. Tries to be subtle.

WILLIAM

Anyone looking for me?

Esmée gives him a curious glance.

ESMÉE

(joking)

Well, now that you mention it, your face was plastered on every wall.

He looks to her. She snatches the wine from his hand. Studies him. Takes a sip.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

Front page of the paper too.

(beat)

One pilot drew your name across the sky with smoke.

WILLIAM

I get it. Thanks...

ESMÉE

(turning serious)

I thought you said you weren't going to bring any trouble here?

WILLIAM

I won't.

(a heavy beat)

I'm not.

ESMÉE

Then why would soldiers be looking for you?

WILLIAM

It's a long story.

ESMÉE

We have time. Plenty of it.

She pushes him the wine. He waves it off.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

You said you weren't a deserter.

WILLIAM

I'm not...completely.

He fidgets in his seat. Glances at his GUN and knapsack on the table. She notices.

ESMÉE

Would you hurt me?

WILLIAM

No. Definitely not. Not ever.

Something is burning in her. Some fire we've barely seen before. An unspoken anger.

ESMÉE

You mean, not again?

WILLIAM

I've made poor decisions in the past. Weak ones. But I've accepted and admitted those failings.

ESMÉE

Not to me.

WILLIAM

Esmée...

He reaches for his gun/knapsack.

But Esmée snatches the gun. Won't point it at him, but won't let him get to it first.

ESMÉE
So you lied to me?

WILLIAM
No. Please I--

ESMÉE
Get out right now. Collect your things.

He scrambles to stand.

WILLIAM
You don't understand.

ESMÉE
My Papa and brother died because of cowards like you. You won't stay in my house.

WILLIAM
I didn't desert. I just needed to leave.

ESMÉE
You were scared. Small. You pathetic--

William snatches the barrel of the gun from her. And it FIRES. Right by his face.

He slams her against a wall. Pries the gun from her hands.

WILLIAM
I'm not. But I can't go back.

Esmée trembles in his grasp. Terrified. He lets her go. And she stumbles away. Gasps for air.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
I'm sorry. I--I didn't mean to hurt you.

She backs away from him. Doesn't dare get too close.

ESMÉE
You lied and I asked you to leave.

William tosses the gun to the ground.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
This is my home and--

He sits back at the table. Face in his hands. She looks to the gun on the ground. Decides against it.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
And...

WILLIAM
Do you want me to leave for good?

ESMÉE
You lied to me.

WILLIAM
And this whole thing isn't a lie?
Every breath. Every flower. Every
touch. They're nothing compared to
what's going on out there.

ESMÉE
Nothing?

WILLIAM
So, I'll ask again. Do you want me to
leave?

A long beat for a heavy question.

Esmée sits across from him. Pushes him the wine.

ESMÉE
I need to know that I can trust you
again. So tell me what happened.

William swigs the wine.

WILLIAM
I got lost, that's all. Too tired to
resist. Too numb to do anything but
run and kill whatever stood in my
way.

He hides his face in his hands.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
I deserted. And I'm everything you
think I am. Weak. And pathetic. I've
hurt people I care about.

She reaches across the table for him. But he pulls back.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
I didn't mean to. I need you to believe that.

ESMÉE
I do.

WILLIAM
I need to face what I've done one day, but for now...I'm too scared to leave. I don't know what will happen when I step out that gate. What I would feel again if you aren't with me.

William glances at her.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
And I don't want to feel that alone again.

ESMÉE
Mon amour...

WILLIAM
That's why I went looking for the doctor today. I needed to make sure you were alright.

He stands. Goes to Esmée. Broken, but determined. Sure of every step he takes to her side.

William holds her. *Scared to let go.* She closes her eyes. Melts to him.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
If you'll let me. I can keep you safe.

ESMÉE
If I let you.

WILLIAM
It's your choice.

She opens her eyes. *And he's right there.* Impossibly close.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
Always was.

Candlelight flickers across his features.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
I'm here if you want me to be.

ESMÉE

I don't *want* you here.

He retreats an inch. Pain breaks across his face. She lays a hand to his cheek. He shudders at the touch.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

William, I *need* you here.

(beat)

I--

William sweeps her to him. Kisses her fiercely. Passionately.

And she smiles.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - DAY

A warm light shines through the window. Peaceful.

Birds sing outside.

This isn't your normal morning after...this is perfect. As *it should be*.

Esmée's curls fall at her face and bare shoulders. She's awake. Refreshed. Smiling.

Blankets on the floor discretely cover her body.

A fit of pillows and stray feathers.

William watches her. Half awake. Just as much at peace.

WILLIAM

I don't think I've ever seen you so happy.

She smiles. Lays into his shoulder. He embraces it. Holds her close.

ESMÉE

Is that what this is?

He nuzzles her. Kisses her forehead. Plays with the curls in her hair.

WILLIAM

Can this last forever?

ESMÉE

Only if we let it, *amour*.

WILLIAM

And if we wake up tomorrow and it was
all some dream?

ESMÉE

Then be happy that you woke up at
all, because dreams as good as these
most don't come back from.

WILLIAM

I've heard that before...somewhere.

William thinks. Can't place it.

ESMÉE

And?

He shakes it off.

WILLIAM

It's sweet.

ESMÉE

It's morose.

She laughs. Pulls the blankets close.

WILLIAM

How so?

ESMÉE

Because most are happiest only in
death. You have to lose to love. You
have to be nothing to finally feel
free.

WILLIAM

That's a very French and dreary way
to look at it.

ESMÉE

I have no other way to see something
except with my own eyes.

(beat)

But I'd rather be morose than feel
nothing.

He presses her closer. Brushes his fingertips along her bare
shoulders.

WILLIAM

Do you feel this?

A soft giggle from her. Warm. Inviting.

ESMÉE

Oui.

William brushes his lips to her neck.

WILLIAM

(barely a whisper)

And...*this?*

Esmée closes her eyes. Breathes deeply.

ESMÉE

...yes...

She rolls on top of him. Her full weight on his chest. Hair falling around his face.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

I've never felt more alive.

He kisses her fiercely. Falling into the moment.

They retreat only for air. And stare at each other. Not as strangers or lovers, *but two souls finding peace across a dark and meaningless world.* A moment for...

WILLIAM

Oui.

...them.

MONTAGE - A FEW DAYS OF PEACE

They flit around the house and garden. Always close or stealing glances from afar.

New to love. Enjoying the sweat of summer.

Careful and carefree. Each look, a stopped heartbeat. Every touch, a warm sun.

A few peaceful days and warm nights.

It's quiet on the horizon.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - DAY

Esmée folds linens on the bed upstairs. She steals a glance at William in the garden. But he's not there.

She doesn't think much of it.

Goes to the window, waters her flowers on the sill.

Outside on the horizon, military vehicles speed off over the hill. Barely perceptible SOLDIERS over the landscape. They head towards another battle. Another day.

Esmée runs from the bedroom.

Down the stairs.

INT. COTTAGE, MISC - DAY

She searches the house for William.

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

Rushes outside.

ESMÉE

William, I--

Looks to the roof. But it's empty there too. She searches the property line. Goes to the shed. Empty.

Esmée's desperate. Scared for a moment, when--

WILLIAM (O.S.)

Is lunch ready?

She turns. He's at the edge of the woods.

ESMÉE

What were you doing so far from the house?

WILLIAM

Just exploring the property. It just keeps on going. Doesn't it?

ESMÉE

The fence crumbled years ago. And my neighbor Monsieur Lapierre fled before the war came.

William nods. Wipes dirt off his clothes.

WILLIAM

It's wonderful here. You've made yourself a nice home.

He plucks a leaf from a nearby tree. Holds it to the light.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
Entirely unexpected and beautiful.

ESMÉE
It's all I've ever known.

He looks at her curiously. Searches for something more, but she won't give it.

WILLIAM
Not everyone's so lucky.

ESMÉE
Simplicity can be a godsend.

William crumples the leaf. Drops it to the dirt.

WILLIAM
Then the devil's in the details.

He moves to kiss her cheek. All sweat and afternoon. She falls under his touch. He runs his hands through her hair. Feels it just like the leaf.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
It's perfect, don't you think?

Esmée stares at him. *A question in his eyes. But he's not ready to ask that yet. She's not ready to hear it.*

WILLIAM (cont'd)
Is lunch ready?

She pulls back from him. Shakes her head.

ESMÉE
No, but I saw soldiers up the road.

He pushes past her towards the house.

WILLIAM
Again? Are you alright?

ESMÉE
They didn't come close. But it looks like they're leaving.

WILLIAM
They're still nearby? I thought the fighting had gone.

ESMÉE

We both thought that.

WILLIAM

Do you think they'll be coming this way?

ESMÉE

We're safe here. They won't come.

William heads for the house. Stops. Turns. A soft smile.

WILLIAM

Your foot is feeling better. Is the pain gone?

Esmée looks down. She's standing on her foot without crutches or pain. Almost surprised by that.

ESMÉE

I must have forgotten.

He smiles. Continues to the house.

She sits on the wall of the garden. Carefully unwraps her bandaged foot.

It's perfectly healed. Not even a scar. She runs her hands along it. Confused.

Looks back to William, but he's already gone inside.

She wraps up her foot again. Limpes towards him.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Esmée and William lay silently beside each other in bed.

They gaze at the ceiling.

She lays on his arm. Drifts her fingers over his bare chest.

WILLIAM

Do I look different or something?

ESMÉE

Oui.

Esmée's fascinated by him. Every little detail.

WILLIAM

How so?

ESMÉE
Your eyes sometimes...your smile.

WILLIAM
I don't remember smiling much before
this.

ESMÉE
Oui.

Her fingers caress his shoulder. Stop at his bandage.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
Is your arm okay?

William nods. Brushes her off.

WILLIAM
Like it never even happened.

He turns to her. Face to face. Kisses her deeply.

Presses her body to his like he cannot breathe without her
touch. They come away only for air.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
I love you still. You know that,
right?

ESMÉE
Oui.

He turns his gaze back to the ceiling. A little more cold. A
little more distant.

WILLIAM
That's all?

A giggle from her. A playful kiss on the cheek.

ESMÉE
Yes and I love you too.

WILLIAM
Still?

ESMÉE
Always.

He puts his arm around her again. Warm. Comforting.

A lingering but peaceful silence.

WILLIAM

Sometimes I wonder how long I'll stay. I wonder for you too.

ESMÉE

The war is moving on. I don't see any reason to leave.

WILLIAM

It's pretty and calm. But this little garden is a bubble. The real world is out there. We can't just hide here forever.

She looks to him. A little hurt. A little angry.

ESMÉE

War's out there. Violence. Death. And--

WILLIAM

--pain.

A long moment.

ESMÉE

Oui.

He grabs her. Pulls her back on top of him.

WILLIAM

Then let's forget it a little longer then.

They kiss.

EXT. COTTAGE, FRONT YARD - DAY

Esmée stands by the front gate. Not about to cross that threshold.

She watches the field beyond. Perfect clouds drift against a blue sky. Birds soar above.

A familiar flight pattern we've seen before.

She breathes in a sweet warm breeze. Plays with the wildflowers on the fence.

Small footsteps scamper up the road in front of her. A BOY(5) skips up the dirt path toward town. Smiles with rosy red cheeks and a mess of curls.

He pulls a wagon behind him. Struggles with the weight of it.

BOY

Bonjour.

Esmée waves to him, but the boy doesn't see. He runs up the path and out of sight.

ESMÉE

Bonjour.

Her hand hovers above the gate. *Like she may take some jump.* But turns and heads back to the house instead.

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

ESMÉE

William?

She tidies up among the house.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

What would you like for dinner,
chéri?

His knapsack and gun in the corner catch her eye. They're stuffed behind a wooden chest. Partially hidden from view.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

I wanted to make something special.

No response. It's quiet.

Esmée goes to the chest. Curiosity getting the better of her. Pulls out the knapsack. About to search inside when--

WILLIAM (O.S.)

I'm up for anything.

She spins.

William's right behind her in the doorway. Mud caked and sun burnt.

ESMÉE

You scared me.

He walks towards her. Arms outstretched.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

Stop.

He listens.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
Don't you dare come in here with
those muddy boots unless you want to
live with the pigs.

William chuckles. Takes off his boots. Surrounds her in a
hug. Kisses her forehead.

WILLIAM
How about some bacon or sausage then?

ESMÉE
Don't you dare.

WILLIAM
Bread and soup again?

ESMÉE
That is more realistic.

He pulls away from her. Grabs his knapsack and gun.

WILLIAM
We shouldn't keep these lying around.
If any soldiers come by, it could be
dangerous.

Esmée reaches for them.

ESMÉE
I can find a place for--

He keeps them out of her grasp.

WILLIAM
No, I can put them in the shed.
That'd be safest.

William heads for the door. Turns back with a smile.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
How long till dinner?

ESMÉE
Soon.

He nods and leaves with the knapsack.

EXT. COTTAGE - DUSK

Esmée feeds the pigs vegetable scraps and slop. Dredges their pen. Hard laborious work. A sweat on her brow.

She cleans at the mud caked onto her ring.

Esmée spots the scar on her wrist. *Something she rarely tries to notice or acknowledge.*

Runs her finger along it. Red mud stains the skin like blood.

And OINK. A pig brings her out of the daze.

ESMÉE
(offering it food)
Avez-vous faim?

She throws scraps to the pigs until the pail is empty. Drops the bucket by the shed. But stops.

Notices a thick rusty LOCK on the shed door. *Something we've never seen there before.*

Esmée goes to it. Tries the door. It's definitely locked.

She turns back to the house. Curious.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Esmée and William are in bed in the throes of passion, at least for him. She goes through the motions. Writhing and falling, but keeps an eye on a window to the backyard.

Her mind spins.

INT. COTTAGE, KITCHEN - DAY

They sit at the table. Silently eat. She watches him finish his plate.

ESMÉE
I'm sorry it's not much.

WILLIAM
I've never complained, have I?

ESMÉE
Not here, no.

He reaches for her hand and squeezes it.

WILLIAM
Well, for one of my last meals. I'm
enjoying it.

ESMÉE
Why do you say that?

WILLIAM
I have to keep moving. Can't stay
here forever.

ESMÉE
If you leave and they find you, they
may kill you.

WILLIAM
And if they find me here?

ESMÉE
They won't.

WILLIAM
I never meant to stay this long. I'm
just hiding here.

ESMÉE
No, you're hiding away with me. It's
different.

William thinks about it. Doesn't buy it.

WILLIAM
It's nice, Esmée, but it isn't home.
We can't stay here forever.

ESMÉE
But it is *my* home.

He leaves the table. Goes to the back window. Stares out at
the garden. She watches him.

WILLIAM
It's pretty. I'll give you that.
But--

ESMÉE
--but nothing. You promised you would
stay until I'm better.

WILLIAM
But you are...better. Aren't you?

Esmée has gone silent, stone.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
Esmée?

She tucks her fist under the wood table. And

KNOCK.

KNOCK.

ESMÉE
Someone is here.

He looks to the front door.

WILLIAM
Who could find us?

Esmée jumps up. Grabs his hand.

ESMÉE
Come. Quickly.

She runs from the room. Ducks beneath the windows. He follows her. Hides himself from view.

Esmée pulls him behind her. Up the steps.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - DAY

She tucks him away in the closet. Covers him in blankets and clothes.

Another loud KNOCK KNOCK echoes through the house.

ESMÉE
Stay quiet or they will find you.

Esmée closes the door on him.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
(shouts downstairs)
À venir! Un moment.

She rushes from the room.

INT. COTTAGE, CLOSET - DAY

We stay with William's POV. Stuck in the closet.

The front door opens.

The sound of heavy boots around the home.

Muffled VOICES below.

They walk the house slowly and with great care.

William tries to watch them through the floorboards without any luck.

The boots come upstairs. William can see a sliver of a body through the crack in the door from his hiding spot.

He holds his breath.

A painful silence.

ESMÉE

S'il vous plait, Monsieur. As tu fini?

No response.

The boots leave. Heavy down the steps.

Across the home.

ESMÉE (O.S.)

Merci, messieurs.

The door closes and locks.

Silence again. Until Esmée rushes up the steps and throws open the closet door. Embraces him tenderly.

William holds her. Wipes the tears from her face.

WILLIAM

Who was that? I thought--

She hides her face in his chest.

ESMÉE

No one shall take you from me,
amour.

(in French, subtitled)

No one will.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

A warm night. The windows open for a hint of a breeze.

William and Esmée toil beneath a sheet wet with sweat.

Both fall and rise. A moment of release before they collapse into each other.

Esmée brushes her hair from her face. Gasps for breath. Stares at the ceiling.

William doesn't open his eyes. Exhausted.

WILLIAM

That was...

ESMÉE

Pas de mots pour ça.

WILLIAM

What does that mean?

ESMÉE

It took your words from you.

WILLIAM

Yes. That.

He shudders. Breathes deeply. Eyes still closed. Yawns.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

That exactly. You always know exactly what I feel.

Esmée lays on his warm chest. And he pulls her close.

ESMÉE

That is why we're both here... together.

He nods. Slowly drifting off to sleep.

She watches him go.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

Do you really want to leave?

WILLIAM

It's not that simple. You know it isn't.

The moment sits. And he stirs. Going in and out of consciousness

WILLIAM (cont'd)

Do you want to leave?

ESMÉE
With you?

WILLIAM
Who else?

She looks to the ceiling. Runs her fingers along the scar at her wrist in the moonlight.

ESMÉE
I can only leave when I'm ready. Not before.

A mumbled agreement from him.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
Everything outside these walls is dark and dangerous and lonely. I can't face that. I never could. My mother would tuck me in tight and keep away the *monstres*. Keep away that darkness. But it would always find its way out.
(beat)
And my husband...

She plays with the ring on her finger.

Tears roll down her cheeks.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
...he kept them away too. At first. Kept them just out of reach for as long as he could. Until they made him weak and weary. Till they clawed at him from the inside. Till he became the monster that I must forgive.
(beat)
Because, *mon amour*, you are not my first love. Nor are you the first to find me in this darkness.

Quiet except for crickets.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
Say something. Please, *mon amour*.

The moment's heavy.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
William?

She turns to him. And he's asleep. Unconscious.

Her heart breaks.

Esmée lifts his heavy arm off her shoulder. Stands over the bed. Watches him sleep soundlessly.

And she tiptoes from the room.

EXT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

She makes her way from the house to the shed.

Tries the lock, but it's taugt. She grabs a TOOL resting on the pigpen fence. Jams it between the door hinge and the pin for leverage.

And pulls the pin out.

A RUSTY CREAK of metal.

She looks back to the house. No sign of movement. *He's still asleep.*

She does it again for the hinge at the top of the door. Pries the pin out.

The shed door droops. Only held up by the lock.

Esmée slips inside.

INT. SHED - NIGHT

Nearly pitch black.

Esmée crawls in the dark. Feels for the knapsack. Rifles through it. And sees the last thing she'd expect--a small light from inside the bag.

She pulls the light out. Holds the metal object to the window for a better look.

It glows and vibrates. A modern CELL PHONE.

Seemingly impossible. Improbable.

She stares at it, somewhere between fear and horror.

EXT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

The faint outline of Esmée in the shed. The glow of the cell phone on her face.

William watches her from the bedroom window.

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

William picks weeds in the garden. More frustrated than successful.

He rips them from the dirt. The heat and bugs getting to him.

Esmée's at the clothesline. Steals glances at him as he works.

William feels something hard and stops. Digs it from the mud. It's his knife, buried and bloody.

He looks to Esmée, but she hasn't noticed his discovery. She unclips linens. Fills her basket. And heads inside.

Just what he's been waiting for. He tucks the knife into his sleeve and hurries to the shed. Unlocks it with a KEY tucked under a planter.

INT. SHED - DAY

He searches the small space.

His knapsack and gun are missing.

INT. COTTAGE, KITCHEN - DAY

Esmée watches him search the shed.

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

She cleans the hearth.

William storms into the house.

ESMÉE

Will you take your boots off? They're filthy.

He walks right in. Muddies the floors. And up the steps.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

Do you want some coffee?

She heads for the kitchen.

INT. COTTAGE, KITCHEN - DAY

He rummages loudly upstairs. She flinches at every noise.

ESMÉE
Can I help you with something?

No answer.

Esmée pours coffee for them. Leaves a cup for him at the table. Sits down herself.

Heavy boots at the doorway. She doesn't look up.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
We're out of cream and sugar. *Pardon, mon amour.*

William's silent.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
How's the garden?

He stares at her. Rigid and cold. Doesn't touch the drink.

WILLIAM
Not good. If you plan to stay here through winter, you'll starve.

ESMÉE
We can always eat the pigs.

WILLIAM
Is the butcher dead as well as the baker?

She still won't look at him.

ESMÉE
We don't need them. We can handle it ourselves.

WILLIAM
I'm sure you think so.

Esmée stands abruptly. Pours his coffee down the sink.

ESMÉE
I'm going into town for a short while. Just to get a few things.

She tries to leave. He blocks her path. And she meets his gaze finally. This isn't just passion between them. This is fire and fear. *Anger we just don't understand yet.*

WILLIAM

Like what?

ESMÉE

Cream and sugar. Maybe something to bring us through winter.

She presses past him. And he lets her.

WILLIAM

When will you be back?

ESMÉE

Before dark.

Esmée leaves out the back and heads for the treeline.

MONTAGE - INT/EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

William tosses the house.

Looks for his knapsack and his gun.

Breaks furniture.

Tears the empty pages from the books.

Leaves the place in shambles.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

William sits on the edge of the bed.

Moonlight shines through the thin curtains.

He watches the treeline for her.

There's ARTILLERY fire outside both windows. They may as well be surrounded. *But he doesn't seem to care.*

EXT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Esmée stumbles through the treeline. Full bags in her arms.

She quietly makes her way towards home.

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

The back door is unlocked and propped open.

Inside, her home is wrecked. Possessions are strewn on the floor.

She leaves the groceries in the kitchen and heads upstairs.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

William still sits at the edge of the bed. Barely looks at her when she comes in.

Esmée slips out of her clothes and crawls into bed.

Artillery fire and crickets.

ESMÉE

The fighting is back.

WILLIAM

It never left.

She wraps her arms around him. Rests her head on his shoulder.

ESMÉE

Come to bed. Will you?

Esmée kisses his neck and he melts to it. Lies next to her.

The boom of bullets and explosions echo around them. Neither seem frightened. *There's no time or energy for that anymore.*

ESMÉE (cont'd)

William, would you stay here forever if I asked you?

WILLIAM

What if I left the stove on at home?

ESMÉE

I'm serious.

William turns to her. Brushes the hair from her face.

WILLIAM

Don't you want anything else in life?

ESMÉE

I only need you.

He kisses her.

WILLIAM
 And you can have me anywhere.
 (beat)
 But we can't hide here forever. I
 won't.

ESMÉE
 You have someone else waiting for
 you?

That's...something to him. Painful. And she knows it.
 Brushes his finger to her lips.

WILLIAM
 There's only ever been one. I know
 that now.

He cradles her in his arms.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
 I just hope she knows.

She lets him hold her.

ESMÉE
 And I hope he doesn't forget.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - DAY

William wakes. Feels for Esmée beside him, but he's alone.
 There's a THUMP downstairs.

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

Esmée stacks fresh wood in the hearth. Wipes the soot from
 her dress.

William lumbers down the steps. Rubs his sleepless eyes.

ESMÉE
 Are you hungry?

WILLIAM
 Not really.

ESMÉE
 Anything you want to do today? Maybe
 something special?

He shakes his head.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
How about a game of cards?

WILLIAM
Will you cheat again?

ESMÉE
Only if you let me.

WILLIAM
No. I don't think I'm up for that.

She reaches for his hand. Playful. Smiling.

ESMÉE
Why not?

William lets the moment sit.

WILLIAM
I found my knife in the garden. It
had blood on it.

ESMÉE
I wouldn't know anything about that.

WILLIAM
Did you take my things from the shed?

ESMÉE
(defensive)
Did you lock them away?

WILLIAM
Yes. They weren't yours to go
through.

Esmée turns cross.

ESMÉE
You want them back? Why. To leave?

WILLIAM
We've already talked about this.

ESMÉE
Then let's talk again. Let's make it
interesting.

She goes into the kitchen. Brings out wine and chocolate.
Lays them on the table.

WILLIAM

We've already played this game of ours. I can't. Not again.

Esmée sits and deals out cards. He reluctantly takes a seat across from her.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

What are we doing here?

ESMÉE

Having a conversation. Something honest for once. That's what you want, yes?

She passes him a pile of cards.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

I win, we stay. You win, we leave.

He throws the cards to the ground.

WILLIAM

No, this is just another delay. And I don't have the patience for them any longer.

William takes a bottle of wine. Swigs it.

ESMÉE

Then tell me. Do you have to leave or you want to?

WILLIAM

It's not a choice.

ESMÉE

It's always a choice. It's yes or no. Stay or go. Me or...

He leans across the table. Grabs her. Forces a kiss. But she pulls away. Stops him before it can go any further.

ESMÉE (cont'd)

You have to decide.

WILLIAM

How can you say that? This has all been for you. You're the only reason we're even here.

ESMÉE

Really? That's what you believe?

She slams his phone to the table. He won't dare reach for it.

WILLIAM
Where did you find that?

ESMÉE
(not answering him)
So I'm the only reason we're here?

Esmée rips off her ring. Drops it to the table.

ESMÉE (cont'd)
We were allowed to bring one item.
Just one.
(beat)
And I brought the most important
thing to me...you brought this.

WILLIAM
I haven't spoken to her since--

ESMÉE
Since when? Since I didn't dig deep
enough in counseling to resolve our
issues.

(beat)
No...you spoke to her even then. No
since...since I didn't dig deep
enough in my wrist. Is that when you
really stopped speaking with her?

WILLIAM
You're twisting my words again.

ESMÉE
Did you ever talk to her about Thomas?

WILLIAM
Don't say his name.

ESMÉE
Why, William? You want to hide a
little longer from the truth? You
think I buried myself in here and
dragged you with me. But you never
would speak to me about him.

WILLIAM
BECAUSE HE'S GONE.

ESMÉE
AND THAT GIVES YOU THE RIGHT TO
BETRAY ME? TO FLEE AND--

WILLIAM
DO NOT PRETEND THAT YOU DIDN'T "FLEE"
IN YOUR OWN WAY.

She quiets.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
WHAT? YOU THOUGHT YOUR SCARS WOULDN'T
FOLLOW YOU HERE?

That's too far. And they both feel it. He retreats from Esmée. Hides his face in his hands.

ESMÉE
(sarcastic, name calling)
How brave of you. *Espèce de merde.*

WILLIAM
(in French, subtitled)
*Please, I'm here for you. I have
always been.*

Esmée follows him. Confrontational.

ESMÉE
(in French, subtitled)
*You play your role, nothing more.
You're just pretending.*

WILLIAM
That's the whole point, isn't it? To fix this. Us. This whole fucking charade is to piece you back together and remind me that I'm a lying cheating shit. You're either dead or damaged and it's my fault and responsibility.

ESMÉE
That's not true.

WILLIAM
Do you try to forget here? Build a new life that's quiet and peaceful. Pretend those cannons on the horizon are your protectors? That these walls are your castle and not your cage.

ESMÉE
Please, stop.

WILLIAM

You're forgetting that you have responsibilities and another life. We aren't the only ones that lost Thomas.

ESMÉE

I can't go back. Not yet...I just need you to stay a while longer.

He pulls her close. She sobs to his chest.

WILLIAM

You have to leave with me right now, or you never will. I can't stay any longer. This isn't real.

ESMÉE

It's as real as you standing here. We don't need anyone else.

William brushes a hand to her cheek. And she melts to it.

WILLIAM

I want it to be simple like this. Sweet like wine and wildflowers. I want you, but not here.

ESMÉE

This is my home.

He lets her go. Steps away.

WILLIAM

You believe that, don't you? You want it to be true. You've given up again.

She goes to him, but he keeps his distance.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

I know you, Esmée. You'll drown here and never come up for air. And I won't be there to save you.

ESMÉE

(crying)

I thought you were never going to hurt me again...you promised.

William goes to her. Kisses her forehead gently.

WILLIAM

I promised you peace and you'll have it. It just won't be with me.

He turns and heads for the door.

ESMÉE

Wait...

She follows him out.

EXT. COTTAGE, FRONT YARD - DAY

Through the flowers that blanket the yard.

William goes to the gate. Stops at it.

ESMÉE

Please, just stay a while longer. I don't want this to end.

He turns one last time.

WILLIAM

It won't for you, *mon amour*.

One last look at the house.

One last look to her.

They share a broken smile.

William unhinges the gate and steps through it.

INT. DARK ROOM - NIGHT

And he wakes up to darkness. Blue moonlight on his face.

He gasps. Startled as if roused from a nightmare.

Feels the bed beside him. And he's not alone. Esmée is still asleep. On her forehead, crisscrossing wires and ELECTRODES. He has them too.

The moonlight in the room flickers.

But it's not moonlight at all--it's a television screen reflecting off his face. The screen plays through a tour of the cottage.

In the video: an unfamiliar man and woman embrace on the screen. The man in a military uniform. The woman smiling beside him. The image freezes. Text on the screen appears--handwritten like a quill:

The Cottage

Deluxe packages now available

William pulls the electrodes from his head.

DOCTOR (O.S.)
How was your trip, Mr. Evans?

William turns to a DOCTOR (60s). Tweed and spectacles. We've seen him before--this is the Corporal, just dressed differently. He watches from a desk in the corner.

The lights slowly rise to reveal the modern and sparse space. The room is sleek and black.

In the middle, one bed for Esmée and William. They're dressed in satin clothes, futuristic in design and simplicity.

WILLIAM
It felt so real, Doctor.

DOCTOR
Love normally does...in the moment.

William sits back on the bed. Delirious. Exhausted.

DOCTOR (cont'd)
Are you okay, William?

WILLIAM
I'm just tired.

DOCTOR
That's to be expected.

William collects himself. Looks to Esmée.

DOCTOR (cont'd)
I got your message and I tried to help. She wouldn't hear it.

WILLIAM
I thought this would fix her...us.

DOCTOR
Some people choose to stay. It's not uncommon.

WILLIAM
Then she can stay alone.

DOCTOR
Your session isn't finished. If
you're hoping to save your marriage,
you should plug back in.

WILLIAM
Yes. I should.

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

Esmée takes the steps two at a time. Hurries to the bedroom.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - DAY

And right to the window. Throws open the panes. Watches the
road. The rickety fence sways in the breeze.

She knows he'll come back. She feels it.

INT. DARK ROOM - DAY

William softly brushes her sleeping face.

WILLIAM
I should. But I won't.

He drops his hand from her cheek.

The Doctor opens a BLACK VAULT at the foot of their bed.
Inside, a CELL PHONE and a RING. He hands them to William.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
I couldn't leave everything behind.

William opens the cell phone. The screensaver--William,
Esmée, and a little BOY(5) smiling for a camera: this is
THOMAS. *We've seen him before, the child with the wagon and
mess of curls.*

Another YOUNG BOY(3) giggles in William's arms, another son.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
I'm still a father. I may not have
been able to save Thomas or help her,
but I won't leave him.
(looks at young boy on phone)
Every day he asked his Papa to come
home. And every day I promised.

William hardens. Builds some resolve.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
And I can't give him up for a dream,
no matter how perfect.

DOCTOR
Even for her?

William stares at the wedding band. Twists the familiar metal between his fingers. Offers it back to the Doctor.

WILLIAM
There are some things we can't come
back from. And some we don't want to.
I can't blame her for either. But
that doesn't mean I can stay.

The Doctor puts the ring back in the black vault. Secures it.
William watches the "Cottage" video play out on the screen.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
But it isn't real. It's just a
distraction. If she really wanted to
save us she'd have woken up.

Esmée stirs. Uncomfortable. Bothered.

DOCTOR
Should we contact you if she wakes up?

WILLIAM
She won't.

He covers her in a blanket.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
I'm just happy I heard her laugh
again. And cry. And love. One last
time.

The Doctor holds open an exit door. A futuristic hallway beyond. A few employees bustle from closed rooms.

DOCTOR
I'll make sure she's comfortable.

WILLIAM
Will she be alone?

DOCTOR
That's up to her. But she'll be
happy. I can promise that.

William nods and heads for the door.

DOCTOR (cont'd)
Mr. Evans, can I ask. Why choose this
place...
(motions to Cottage screen)
if you thought she might not leave?

William watches the video play out on the monitors. Two strangers flit about. Their love pure in momentary bliss. They drift among the gardens and the fields. He smiles at the loss of it all, the memory of it all.

WILLIAM
She always loved wildflowers.

And William leaves. Closes the door behind him.

The Doctor goes to her machine. Turns some dials. An IV floods a blue drug into her arm.

She smiles. Relaxes. Nearly weightless on the table. A flux of emotion. Eyes fluttering behind her lids.

The Doctor presses a series of keys in a console and the edges of the bed fold and rise. The mattress mechanically shifting to a box...a casket.

It lifts and rises on its own. Hovers across the floor and into the dark beyond.

He turns on a record player at his desk. Plays a familiar tune we've heard before--*something old and melancholy*.

INT. COTTAGE, BEDROOM - DAY

Esmée sobs at the window. Overcome by grief and loneliness. Overcome by the life of it all.

The record player scratches and hums downstairs. Plays something familiar.

She heaves and laughs. Eyes fluttering. Overcome by bliss. Dazed by the beauty around her.

Esmée throws open the window. Searches the horizon. Peace and quiet. It's almost perfect.

A bee lands among the flowers on the sill. And she reaches for it. Feels the soft bristle of its fur. It stings her, but doesn't hurt. The lack of pain almost a surprise.

Up the road, something catches her eye. A lone soldier trudging up the path. His footprints stir up dust.

Wildflowers in his hands.

She spots him. Runs downstairs.

INT. DARK ROOM - DAY

The box drifts into the dark recesses of the room, almost lost to the shadow until--

The far wall becomes alight with a dim blue glow. It's covered in hundreds of square panels from ceiling to floor, wall to wall. Like cold-lockers in a morgue.

And Esmée's box rises to an empty slot. Nearly weightless.

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

Esmée runs through the house. Light on her feet. Nearly weightless.

And through the front door.

INT. DARK ROOM - DAY

Esmée's box slides into the darkness of the empty slot. A smile on her sleeping face.

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

They meet on the lawn. Crash into each other. All laughs and love and wildflowers.

They kiss. And it's perfect. Happy.

There's something off about him...but you can barely tell. Something uncanny. Artificial. But she doesn't seem to mind.

ESMÉE

You came back?

WILLIAM

Of course.

FADE OUT