

EXCERPT FROM ON THE EVE OF A GREAT BATTLE

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EXT. A FRENCH ARMY ENCAMPMENT - MORNING

The heat of battle warms a foggy day, staining a grassy field on the edge of forest with mud and blood. Constance is wearing the uniform of Vivandière. Chaos abounds, she is running through the ranks of soldiers, providing ammo and engaging in combat. A man on a horse charges at her with a saber drawn, she shoots the horse and they fall. Three enemy foot soldiers approach. One begins to grapple with a french Captain, ROCHE, and as one enemy soldier occupies him another seeks to stab him in the back, Constance shoots them both and they collapse. Roche looks for the origin of his savior. He catches her gaze and nods at her in momentary gratitude. As she goes to shoot the other, her gun misfires. The man turns his blade on her and she draws her blade in turn. Then, as he runs for her, a cannonball cuts through him. He was eliminated by his own friendly fire. Constance steps back shocked and runs for the cover of the forest. She makes it through the death and gore surrounding her and leans up against a tree panting. She throws her head back to rest against the bark momentarily.

INT. THE SLEEPING QUARTERS OF THE BARRACKS - DUSK

Constance is lying in the barracks, the cot replacing the bark. The room is packed with young men trying to sleep. Her bed (if it can even be called that) is next to Emeric's. She holds a quiet anger close, and it bars her from sleep.

CONSTANCE

I do detest you.

EMERIC

You're not indifferent to me. If you still can detest me you can still call me brother.

CONSTANCE

I detest what you've done to me brother.

EMERIC

You enlisted too. It made sense after everything... We can leave when my fortune is made.

CONSTANCE

And when will that be? Adjudant sous-officier?

EMERIC

These things take time.

CONSTANCE
I'm tired of waiting.
(she notices her shaking
hands)
Dammit! I'm tired of shaking.

EMERIC
A woman's affliction to be sure.

Constance sits up and puts her boots on.

CONSTANCE
Then why don't you clean your
rifle? Or is this affliction
shared?

Constance rises from her cot with gusto and steps over the
various sleeping soldiers.

EMERIC
Constance, I'm sorry I'm-

CONSTANCE
Don't trouble yourself. I'm going
for a walk.

Emeric makes a dismissive gesture (also with shaking hands)
and turns over to go back to sleep.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE SLEEPING QUARTERS OF THE BARRACKS - DUSK

Constance stands a moment looking at her hands and then is
taken breathless. She stares at the skyline, while fighting
for control of her lungs. She eventually recovers and walks
among the tents until she finds the canteen. She goes inside.

INT. THE CANTEEN - LATE DUSK

The canteen is run down with barrels for tables and sorry
mismatched chairs. But, there's a certain unsteady warmth to
it, akin to Constance's old apartment. AMELIE stands cleaning
with an odd fervor.

AMELIE
(without looking up. A
certain routine in the
words)
Good evening. Dinner's all closed.
But I can get you some wine, if
you'd like?

CONSTANCE
Wine. Yes. I'll take that.

AMELIE
A woman!

CONSTANCE
(with a sarcastic
flourish)
Haven't you seen one before?

Amelie hands Constance her wine and Constance goes and sits at one of the makeshift tables.

AMELIE
Not one dressed like you.

CONSTANCE
I'm a Vivandière. I supply the frontlines with ammo and-

AMELIE
Oh I know what you do. I just haven't seen one of you out this late before.

CONSTANCE
We do exist at all hours.

AMELIE
(taken aback)
Well, I know that.
(suddenly self conscious)
Forgive me, I've only been here a few months.

CONSTANCE
Leave.

AMELIE
Excuse me.

CONSTANCE
While you can. I can't tell you what's worse, living to regret staying, or death.

AMELIE
We are winning. What is there to regret?

CONSTANCE
The road to victory.

They sit in a uncomfortable silence. Amelie openly stares at Constance, until Constance stares back, then Amelie averts her eyes and returns to compulsively cleaning. Now, Constance is the one who studies Amelie.

CONSTANCE (CONT'D)

Forgive me, I seem poised for battle even in moments of peace as of late.

AMELIE

Excuse me.

CONSTANCE

Never mind. Forgive my earlier crassness.

AMELIE

There is nothing to forgive.

CONSTANCE

Then forget instead and let's start anew. My name is Constance D'aramitz.

AMELIE

Good evening Mme. D'aramitz.

CONSTANCE

My brother is the only D'aramitz. Call me Constance.

AMELIE

Well then, you must call me Amelie.

CONSTANCE

As you'd like, Amelie.

AMELIE

How did you become a Vivandière?

CONSTANCE

My brother always had hankering for war and it wasn't as if we could stay around Rouen after everything- It's a long sordid story. But it ends in my brother enlisting and my being dragged along.

AMELIE

I suppose you and I have the same story then. My husband has been with Napoleon since the Second Coalition and I decided-

CONSTANCE

You'd like to know the man who is
going to make you a widow?

AMELIE

(caught in a raw memory.
Not hearing and
overlapping with
Constance)

There was too much temptation at
home. I over indulged.

(catches herself)

I'm sorry. I've since reformed.
I'll have you know.

CONSTANCE

The beautiful are made for
indulgences. Besides, sin has a way
of catching up with all of us. Who
could blame us for giving in?

AMELIE

It does indeed.

(they lock eyes for a
fleeting moment)

I'd better close up for the night.

CONSTANCE

I'm sorry. Did I offend?

Amelie busies herself with putting out the candles.

AMELIE

No, you did far worse, you
flattered me. I must be home to
Jaques. Goodnight.

Constance watches Amelie leave.