

THE GREAT SIGN

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FADE IN:

ON THE SUN IN ALL ITS BRILLIANCE

blazing down from a blue cloud-swept sky.

AN ELDERLY PRIEST

squints at it and wipes his brow with a handkerchief. Walks up the sidewalk of a quiet TREE-LINED STREET.

He comes to a halt in front of an old white-masonry building with black double doors and a statue of St. Teresa out front.

SUPER:

CARMELITE CONVENT OF SAINT TERESA

COIMBRA, PORTUGAL 1953

INT. CONVENT - DAY

A woman's soft hands clasp the wooden beads of a rosary: the plain, hand-carved rosary of a peasant.

ANGLE WIDENS

To include the elderly priest and the woman with the rosary, SISTER LUCIA DOS SANTOS (46). Sister Lucia is a stout, plain looking woman with black-framed glasses and a traditional habit with only her face exposed.

The two sit on either side of a wooden lattice extending across the top half of a wall like the bars of a cell. Sister Lucia is a cloistered nun and her only contact with the priest can come through a little door in the latticework where they might shake hands or exchange items.

The priest is interviewing her, taking notes.

ELDERLY PRIEST

One last thing, Sister, if I may.

The vision of Hell...

(off Lucia's look)

I won't ask you to describe it again,
it's just that there's something I
don't quite understand.

SISTER LUCIA

Understand or believe?

The priest looks caught.

ELDERLY PRIEST

It's not that I have even a trace of doubt about your story, it's just that I find it difficult to accept that our Blessed Mother would reveal so terrible a vision to such young children. After all you were only ten years old.

SISTER LUCIA

And Francisco was nine, Jacinta only seven.

ELDERLY PRIEST

Exactly, and at that age. Perhaps in the rapture of the moment you mistook a vision of something else for a--

SISTER LUCIA

No, there was no mistake. Our Lady showed us the vision of Hell as a warning to all her children.

ELDERLY PRIEST

But do you really believe so many souls are bound for eternal suffering?

SISTER LUCIA

God is already too much offended by sin. And now more than ever man is in great need of a renewal of faith. If it is not done, taking into account the present development of humanity, only a limited number of the human race will be saved.

ELDERLY PRIEST

It has always been my hope that God will save the greater part of humanity.

SISTER LUCIA

Father, many will be lost.

ELDERLY PRIEST

It is true that the world is full of evil, but there is always a hope of salvation.

SISTER LUCIA

No, Father, many will be lost.

FADE TO BLACK:

TITLE:

FATIMA:

The Great Sign

FADE IN:

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Another rosary dangles from a bedside table. A small silver image of Mother Mary among the beads spins in the breeze, sparkling in the pale afternoon light.

In the background, the blurred image of a man and woman making love, tenderly.

LATER

Afterward. ALAIN and MICHELLE LAFRANCOUER, a beautiful young couple, lie together in bed. Alain sleeps, but Michelle lies awake with tears on her cheeks.

LATER STILL

Michelle, wearing a pretty blue dress, stands before a dresser combing her hair. She puts on the rosary, has trouble with the clasp. Alain, in a French captain's uniform, circa 1917, comes and helps.

ALAIN

The clasp is broken. Here, let me.

He takes the rosary. Presses on the clasp. Puts the rosary around his wife's neck and kisses her cheek.

Looks in the mirror at Michelle who returns a faltering smile.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Alain and Michelle eat dinner. She checks the clock.

Which reads 4:20.

IN THE FOYER

Michelle and Alain put on their coats. Michelle touches a crucifix on the door, blesses herself then steps outside. Alain heaves a haversack across his shoulder and picks up his rifle. Takes a long last look at his home then follows her out.

EXT. STABLE - DAY

Alain harnesses a black and white mare to a buckboard. Helps Michelle onto the seat.

EXT. CHEVOIS, FRANCE - DAY

Alain and Michelle ride through their village. An old woman feeding chickens watches them pass.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

They travel a dirt road lined with poplars. Michelle tucks her hand into Alain's coat pocket and nestles against him.

ALAIN

Cold?

Michelle glances up at Alain, obscurely, as if the question were out of place. She looks away.

MICHELLE

No.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - CHEVOIS, FRANCE - DAY

Michelle and Alain climb steps onto an open-air platform where a sign with chipped white paint reads: "Chevois". They sit on a bench below a train schedule that shows the date: "October 5, 1917".

Beyond the track, a field of lion-colored wheat sways in the wind. A bank of angry clouds gathering in the east.

ALAIN

There's a storm coming.

Michelle looks down-track for any sign of the train, her hair blowing across her face. Alain puts the strands in place and Michelle pulls sharply away.

ALAIN (CONT'D)

Cherie, do you really want to see me
off like this?

(leans in, softly)

I'll get another leave in six months.

Michelle just stares into the distance.

ALAIN (CONT'D)

What is it?

MICHELLE

(without turning)

You know what.

Apparently he does. Alain draws back and thinks. Decides.

ALAIN

It's out of the question.

MICHELLE

(turns, eyes flashing)

Really? Why? Men are leaving the front every day, by the hundreds. What makes you so important? The war goes on if you're killed. So what if you don't go back?

ALAIN

And if everyone felt that way?

MICHELLE

Then there'd be no war. What's wrong with that?

Alain takes a moment.

ALAIN

But there is a war and I'm part of it.

MICHELLE

Yes, I know, your men, your duty to France. They mean more to you than I ever will.

ALAIN

You don't believe that.

MICHELLE

I don't know what to believe. All I know is I can't watch you leave again. I can't.

She sobs. Lays her head against Alain.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Oh, Alain, please, don't go.

ALAIN

Cherie.

MICHELLE

Something will happen this time. I just know it.

(looks up at him)

Let's leave. Tonight! We'll just pack and go. It doesn't matter where, just so long as we're together.

Alain pulls her into an embrace and holds her.

A smoke-billowing train coming into view in the distance.

MOMENTS LATER

The troop train is stopped beside the platform.

Alain walks with Michelle over to a car. Sets down his rifle and kisses her.

Michelle clings to him, pulls him back as he tries to go and kisses him once more.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Oh, my love, promise me you'll come back. Please... promise. You always keep your promises.

Michelle breaks down and Alain wipes her tears and looks into her eyes.

ALAIN

Michelle, Cherie... I can't make you any promises, except to love you, always.

He gives her a last kiss. Picks up his gear and boards.

Michelle follows him down the length of cars, past windows filled with soldiers returning to the front.

She cranes to keep an eye on him. Momentarily loses him until Alain appears at an open window and reaches for her.

The train WHISTLE BLOWS. The wheels turn.

Michelle takes Alain's hand and kisses it. Holds on to him and trots after the train until she loses the pace and he slips away from her.

Michelle stands by the track watching him go. A receding image that gets smaller and smaller until she's finally lost from view.

EXT. FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE - TRAIN TRACK - NIGHT

Sheets of rain. Alain's train rushes by, the train lights illuminating a refugee family waiting for the train to pass.

EXT. TRAIN DEPOT - NEAR THE FRONT - NIGHT

Favoring a train station sign peppered with shrapnel holes. Alain's train rolls by.

Brakes before a war-battered depot where a dozen soldiers disembark, Alain among them.

He turns his collar against the rain and walks off through the charred remains of a town, an artillery barrage flashing on the horizon.

EXT. ROAD TO THE FRONT - NIGHT

Under cover of night military vehicles move to and from the front. Pick up Alain marching by the side of the road.

EXT. ROAD TO THE FRONT - DAY

In the gray morning light a black stick-figure tree stands alone in a field pocked-marked with artillery blasts.

A ROBIN pops his head out of a hole in the trunk and welcomes the day with a song.

A horse-drawn ambulance passes through frame, the exhausted team straining to move the tires caked with mud.

Following the ambulance we find Alain in a line of men slogging through mud past a row of BOOMING French 75s.

EXT. FRENCH LINE - WESTERN FRONT - DAY

Alain darts between a column of trucks in the road. Climbs a small hill lined with OFFICER DUGOUTS - wood and stone structures built into the earth. Reaches the top and stops.

WHAT ALAIN SEES:

A quarter-mile wide strip of trenchworks that extend north and south as far as the eye can see.

Beyond the barbed wire and parapets that marked the French front line lies a swath of pockmarked earth: "No-man's-land", all that stands between the French army and the crenellated contours of the German fortifications.

ON ALAIN

Staring. Stone-still.

EXT. TRENCHES - DAY

Alain strides through the twists and turns of the trenches past a gong and mallet suspended from the trench wall with a sign: "Gas Alarm". Other signs read: "Mudville", "Keep your head down!", "Ach! Gott in himmel!", etc.

FARTHER ON

He passes mud-encrusted men lining the trench walls. Playing cards. Cleaning rifles. Resting.

One man de-louses his tunic, running a lighter over a seam.

Another soldier scurries by with a dead rat and joins comrades who have hung a half-dozen rats from a stick by their tails like trophies.

He turns at a trench crossroad where an arrow points the way to "LOUSELAND".

MATCH-CUT: TO A HAND-PAINTED SIGN THAT READS "LOUSELAND".

Beneath it SERGEANT MICHEL TREZEGUET (37) sits on an ammo crate stitching a boot. Sgt. Trezeguet is lanky, wears glasses and if he sported a goatee could pass as a professor.

A dozen soldiers lounge near him. Among them are BLANC and FONTAINE, two young soldiers who watch the sergeant work.

BLANC

Hey, Trezeguet! How much to stitch my underwear? I got a hole right in the seat.

Blanc and Fontaine laugh.

SGT. TREZEGUET

I've got two words for you, Blanc, and they're not "let's dance".

Alain rounds a corner into the trench.

FONTAINE

Hey, Captain!

Everyone's up, not at attention, but in genuine surprise. Alain moves through them acknowledging their greetings.

Ad libs: "Hey, Captain." "Good to see you, sir." Et cetera. Alain greets Sgt. Trezeguet.

ALAIN

Sergeant.

SGT. TREZEGUET

Sir. Welcome back.

They smile, share a look that suggests each man feels a little more sure of his place by having the other by his side.

Alain takes a seat on an ammo crate. His men gathered around him like pigeons in a park.

BLANC

Any word from HQ, Captain? Rumor is we're in for an offensive.

FONTAINE

Ah, you and your rumors. They flow
in your ears and out your ass. C'mon,
Captain, where's the good stuff? We
know your wife, she wouldn't send
you back with one arm as long as the
other.

Alain smiles and digs into his haversack. He hands out a
bottle of wine, cheese and a few tins to the men.

ALAIN

With her compliments.

The men reach in greedily, "Thanking" him.

SGT. TREZEGUET

All right, that's it, give him some
air. Go on... And save me a cup of
wine.

The men disperse leaving Alain alone with Sgt. Trezeguet.

SGT. TREZEGUET (CONT'D)

You just cost me a week's pay.
(off Alain's look)
I bet half the squad you wouldn't
come back.

Alain offers Sgt. Trezeguet a cigarette and lights him.

ALAIN

Only half?

SGT. TREZEGUET

The half with money. How's Michelle?

ALAIN

Good. Getting by.

SGT. TREZEGUET

You know, at times I think it's
rougher on them than it is on us,
until the shelling starts.

Alain looks down-trench at a small crater and scorched
sandbags - a recent hit.

SGT. TREZEGUET (CONT'D)

We took a mortar round last night,
lost a new man.

Alain takes a quick inventory of the men in the trench.

ALAIN

Who bought it?

SGT. TREZEGUET

Some kid with shit for luck. Just his second day on the line.

ALAIN

Then I don't know him?

SGT. TREZEGUET

No. Name's Guillod, if I remember right. He's at the forward aid station. By the look of him, they won't be moving him back.

The words sit heavy in the air. Alain takes a long drag on his cigarette. Looks at a rat licking dried blood off a scorched duckboard.

EXT. FORWARD AID STATION - DAY

The tailgate of a truck drops open and reveals a load of dead soldiers. Two orderlies walk up and heave a corpse atop the stack.

The corpse's head turns at an angle and reveals a plum purple face and bright red lips - a chlorine gas victim.

Pick up Alain walking pass the truck, entering the

FORWARD AID STATION

A camouflaged tarp erected against the side of a hill.

He weaves between wounded men on blankets on the ground. Comes upon an OLD DOCTOR kneeling over a burn victim.

ALAIN

Doctor.

The doctor turns. The look on his face is one of complete exhaustion.

ALAIN (CONT'D)

I'm looking for Private Guillod, B company. He was brought in last night.

DOCTOR

(waves a languid hand)

If he came in last night he's somewhere over there. If he's still here. These have been coming in all day from G Sector.

Alain looks down at the burned man, his whole upper body crisper than overcooked bacon.

ACROSS THE TENT

Alain looks around at row upon row of wounded men, one in worst condition then the other

He grabs a chart hung from the end of a cot and reads a scribbled name: "J. Guillod, Private".

Both of the boy's leg are blown off below the knee, his right hand is missing and there's a bandaged cavity where his left shoulder should be. He is bathed in sweat. Trembling.

Alain's jaw tightens and he winces a little as if he can almost feel the boy's pain. A HOSPITAL AIDE happens by carrying a pail of bloody bandages.

HOSPITAL AIDE

One of yours, Captain?

ALAIN

Yeah.

HOSPITAL AIDE

I gave him some morphine for the pain. Not much else we can do.

They both look down on the boy.

HOSPITAL AIDE (CONT'D)

Tough kid. Too tough for his own good.

The Aide moves on. Alain remains, watching the boy.

With what appears to be a great effort the boy's left hand turns over and opens. Alain sits and takes his hand. The dying boy's lips quivering an inaudible thanks.

EXT. FORWARD AID STATION - DAY

Alain emerges from the tent and takes a long drink from his canteen. He stares off into space, numb, then walks away.

EXT. RESERVE TRENCH - DAY

A grizzled OLD SOLDIER is strapped to a wagon wheel, caked in mud, like some poor sot out of the Inquisition. A sign above him reads: "*Failed to salute an officer.*"

NOTE: This is an American movie so the main characters speak English throughout the film. However, all written words are in their authentic language with or without subtitles. This includes French, German, and Portuguese as the case may be.

ALAIN

Comes down-trench to a room-size opening of intersecting trenches where the old soldier is strapped to the wheel.

Alain reads the sign, fumes, and draws his bayonet.

ALAIN
God damn them all.

He cuts the old soldier loose. Soldiers peel off the trench walls and gather around. One slips away down-trench. A BIG CORPORAL steps forward.

BIG CORPORAL
Captain, I wouldn't do that if I
were you.

The old soldier falls into Alain's arms.

ALAIN
(to big corporal)
Give me a hand.

Big Corporal hesitates, then comes and helps Alain lay the man under a lean-to.

The old soldier raises a hand in weak salute and grins mischievously at Alain who can't help but smile. Alain gives him a drink from his canteen.

ALAIN (CONT'D)
Easy.
(to no one in
particular)
How long was he up there?

The soldiers play dumb. Alain looks at Big Corporal.

ALAIN (CONT'D)
How long?

BIG CORPORAL
A day and a half. No water, no
rations. Those were the orders.

ALAIN
Whose orders?

LT. PAPIN (O.S.)
Mine, sir!

A "sir" punctuated with contempt. Alain turns to LIEUTENANT PAPIN, early twenties, short, and spruce - as much as one can be at the front. He glares at Alain.

LT. PAPIN (CONT'D)
Lieutenant Phillipe Papin the Second,
Captain.

The same supercilious emphasis on Alain's rank.

LT. PAPIN (CONT'D)
That name mean anything to you?

Something flickers in Alain's eyes, apparently it does. He turns back to the old soldier and washes mud off his face with water from the canteen.

ALAIN
This man is severely dehydrated.
I'd think a general's son would
recognize that.

Lieutenant Papin's men exchange looks, awaiting the lieutenant's reaction.

LT. PAPIN
Of course he's dehydrated. He's
being punished. Now I suggest you
leave him be and go back to your own
unit, sir.

Alain gives the old soldier another drink.

LT. PAPIN (CONT'D)
You're interfering with the legitimate
order of a fellow officer. You
haven't the right. By Army
regulations I can punish him as I
see fit. Captain!

He grabs at Alain's shoulder. Alain wheels and shoves him.

ALAIN
Get your hands off me!

Lieutenant Papin stumbles backward and falls in the mud.

ALAIN (CONT'D)
(to big corporal)
You there, get a stretcher, take
this man to an aid station.

Big Corporal looks from Alain to the lieutenant and back.

ALAIN (CONT'D)
Now!

Big Corporal taps a buddy and together they lay the old soldier on a litter and carry him off.

Lieutenant Papin comes to his feet, shakes mud from his hands.

LT. PAPIN

This will go on report, Captain. I have witnesses! You could be court-martialed. You realize -

ALAIN

Shut up, Lieutenant.

The lieutenant freezes, and his men snicker. Alain comes right up into the man's face.

ALAIN (CONT'D)

Listen, you haughty little pup. These are good men here, who live in mud, share their beds with rats, and fight and die over the same damn ground they fought over the day before, all at your command. And not one of them can tell you why; but they do it just the same. Now if you took your nose out of the air long enough to see that, maybe, just maybe, you'd earn a little respect, *Junior*.

He looks the younger man in the eye. Doubtful he understands. He brushes past him. Lieutenant Papin's eyes flash to his men, who can barely contain their amusement.

EXT. WESTERN FRONT - FRENCH SIDE - NIGHT

Framed by barbed wire, "no-man's-land" - the pockmarked landscape between the French line and the distant spiny silhouette of the German fortifications.

INSIDE A TRENCH

French soldiers huddle together like gargoyles along the trench wall, dozing. Bored sentries man the firing steps.

Overhead, a flare rockets into the night sky.

INT. OFFICER'S SHELTER - NIGHT

Alain sits on a cot writing a letter by candlelight. Nearby, Sgt. Trezeguet hunches over a tin burner brewing coffee. He brings Alain a cup who sips it and reacts bitterly.

SGT. TREZEGUET

It's the ninth time I've used the grounds. Kinda' sticks to the tongue doesn't it.

ALAIN
Burns a hole in it.

Sgt. Trezeguet sits on a cot across from Alain who braves another sip then resumes writing.

SGT. TREZEGUET
(re: Alain's letter)
To Michelle?

Alain nods. He fills the page and continues in the margin.

SGT. TREZEGUET (CONT'D)
What'd you do, go through all your
paper again?

Sgt. Trezeguet rummages through a bag, comes up with a sheet.

SGT. TREZEGUET (CONT'D)
Here, I've got no use for it.

ALAIN
What about that girl in Lyon?

SGT. TREZEGUET
The schoolteacher? Oh, I cut her
loose. All she ever wrote me was
awful poetry and complaints about
her bunions. The girl had terrible
bunions. I wrote her a letter in
your name, told her I died; bravely
of course.

The distant RAT-A-TAT-TAT of a machine-gun filters into the room... along with a FAR OFF SCREAM. Alain and Sgt. Trezeguet look toward the entrance and listen. Ominous silence.

Sgt. Trezeguet kisses a crucifix around his neck.

SGT. TREZEGUET (CONT'D)
(off Alain's skeptical look)
Heathen.

ALAIN
Better a heathen than a blind fool.

Alain signs off on the letter, seals it.

SGT. TREZEGUET
So what do you think happens after
we check out?

ALAIN
Nothing. We go down into the dirt
like the dogs... and there we stay.

SGT. TREZEGUET

Captain, you've been too long at the front.

ALAIN

Too long in this world.

A quiet beat, then...

SGT. TREZEGUET

I don't buy it. There's got to be something behind all this. A God. A Christian God who loves us all.

ALAIN

Loves us so much he just stands by while we slaughter each other by the thousands.

SGT. TREZEGUET

Maybe it's not his affair. Or maybe... maybe he's just extremely patient. You know before the war I drove a cab in Paris. All day long I'd go to and fro, like a little bee among the hive. But at night when I got home, the first thing I'd do was go up to my apartment building roof and just sit, sit and stare out at the sunset and at a small tree that someone had put into a pot. I used to look at that tree and envy it. How it could spend its whole life in that one spot and be content.

ALAIN

Now who's been too long at the front.

Sgt. Trezeguet chuckles.

SGT. TREZEGUET

I know, it sounds crazy. It just seems to me that everywhere I look in nature I see peace and patience. In the meadows and streams, among the birds and animals, even in summer and winter, everything. There's a pace to it, an acceptance. We look right past it, but it's there. This all-encompassing patience. 'To everything there is a season'. No?... I believe that it's in that patience that we get a glimpse of the mind of God.

ALAIN

And it's in his mind to just stand
by, patiently, while we kill each
other?

SGT. TREZEGUET

Why not? It's what he did when they
killed his son.

A MESSENGER pops his head through the curtained doorway.

MESSENGER

Captain LaFrancouer? You're wanted
at battalion headquarters.

Alain looks at Trezeguet, in his eyes the question - "Now
what?".

INT. COMMAND TRENCH - BATTALION HQ - NIGHT

A fully operational field headquarters built into the earth.
Staff, telephones, tables, cots, etc.

In the dim light GENERAL GEORGE PAPIN, 50, looms over an
operation map atop a camp table, a crowd of officers around
him, including Lieutenant Papin hovering in the back row.

Alain appears in the entryway. Speaks with a junior officer.
He goes to the general. While he waits, Alain looks around,
his eyes linking up with the cool gaze of Lieutenant Papin.

The general nods to the junior officer who waves Alain
forward. Alain walks up and snaps to attention.

ALAIN

Captain LaFrancouer reporting as
ordered, sir.

GENERAL PAPIN

At ease, Captain.
(to an officer)
Give him room.

Alain steps up to the map. General Papin's gaze goes from
his son to Alain where he holds for a moment, measuring him.

GENERAL PAPIN (CONT'D)

I understand you're just back from
leave, Captain. Is that right?

ALAIN

Yes, sir.

GENERAL PAPIN

Good, then you should be well-rested.

General Papin examines the map.

GENERAL PAPIN (CONT'D)
Captain, I need some prisoners. I know the Boche are planning an offensive and I want fresh intelligence. Your unit will handle it.

ALAIN
Sir, with respect, men in my company undertook the same mission just three nights ago. They're going to wonder why they're coming out of rotation.

GENERAL PAPIN
Tell your men I don't give a damn about rotations. I want fresh prisoners and I'm assigning it to you. Is that understood?

Looks between the general, his son, and Alain clarify the purpose of this -- retribution.

ALAIN
Yes, sir. Is that all, sir?

GENERAL PAPIN
No. No, that's not all.

He comes around the table.

GENERAL PAPIN (CONT'D)
I've had a look at your record, Captain. It's quite impressive, decorations for valor, leadership; three years of service on the front. Long enough to know that strict discipline is the only thing that keeps this army together up here.

Comes to within inches of Alain's face.

GENERAL PAPIN (CONT'D)
If I ever hear again that you've interfered with a fellow officer's disciplining of a soldier, junior officer or not, I'll have you shot on the spot. Understood?

ALAIN
Yes, sir.

General Papin turns back to the map. Alain looks to Lieutenant Papin who oozes satisfaction.

EXT. WESTERN FRONT - NIGHT

A moonless sky over "no-man's-land"...

Across the cratered landscape, lines of barbed wire are strung fifty yards from the German side.

Alain appears from out of the black void of a crater, crawling on his belly with a small keg under his arm.

He reaches the wire. Jams the wooden keg between the strands and slips through the opening. Six men follow close behind, all on their bellies, face first in the mud.

Down the line a flare skyrockets into the air. Phosphorous sparks scattering, lighting up the earth, the outer glow reaching Alain's team.

Alain and his men burrow into the mud, still as stones. A tense moment before the light ebbs and the shadow of night washes over them like a protecting tide.

FARTHER ON

Alain slides headfirst into a crater, through water on the bottom and up the far side. His men follow him in.

Sgt. Trezeguet joins him at the crater edge. They peek over the side at the German line --

An ominous silhouette of wire and parapets.

Alain and Sgt. Trezeguet duck down. Alain turns...

ALAIN

Cat-eyes.

CAT-EYES crawls to his side, a diminutive Frenchman with large dark eyes. Alain nods with his chin and the soldier peeks over the crater's edge.

Fifty yards away there is a salient fortification and... movement!... a helmet, bobbing, and in brief silhouette a pivoting machine-gun barrel.

Cat Eyes slides back to Alain. Speaks just above a whisper.

CAT EYES

A firing point. Fifty meters dead ahead. A widow-maker with a three man crew.

Alain turns.

ALAIN
 (whispers)
 Fontaine. Bastien.

The two soldiers crawl up.

ALAIN (CONT'D)
 Machine gun...
 (points)
 Fifty meters, dead ahead. Take the
 left. Give it five, then over you go.

Fontaine and Bastien nod and crawl away left.

ALAIN (CONT'D)
 Trezeguet. Take Blanc and Cat-eyes
 around right.

Sgt. Trezeguet and Cat Eyes slither back to Blanc. Crawl
 away right. A big soldier, CAPELLE, clambers up to Alain.
 Alain offers him a grenade.

ALAIN (CONT'D)
 How's the arm?

Capelle takes the grenade, pats his right shoulder.

CAPELLE
 Good as new.

EXT. GERMAN LINE - OBSERVATION TREE - NIGHT

A mangled leafless tree on the German side that when viewed
 from behind reveals a hollowed out trunk where an observer
 on a ladder peers out through a slit.

Before him is dead-still no-man's-land. Suddenly there is
 movement to his left - the shadowy outline of a man crawling
 toward him.

Observer waves down to two runners at the base of the tree.
 He holds up a finger, looks again through the opening, and
 signals in silent, frantic motion - two! No, five!

The runners race off down each side of the trench. Passing
 the word to fellow soldiers as they go. Word spreads as
 alerted soldiers wake the man next to them.

NO-MAN'S-LAND

Alain peers over the crater rim, a grenade in each hand.
 Suddenly a flare shoots into the sky exposing them...

And the Germans open up with everything they've got.

Fontaine and Bastien take hits, writhing on the ground.

Sgt. Trezeguet, Blanc and Cat-Eyes return fire.

Alain and Capelle throw grenades.

WHAM! WHAM! They blow away the Mauser.

The Germans answer. A dozen stick-grenades hurtle through the night... and land. Exploding in rapid succession - BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Sgt. Trezeguet comes up from under the debris. Turns to Blanc and Cat Eyes - dead at his side.

He makes a mad crawl for the French line, bullets whizzing past his head as he does his best to crawl into his helmet.

Somewhere a WHISTLE BLOWS. And answering fire erupts from the French side. Star shells and French rockets on parachutes light up the sky.

ALAIN

Returns fire. Grabs Capelle.

ALAIN

Go!

Capelle bolts. Gets ten meters and is cut down. Alain scrambles after him, bullets whizzing past his head.

He checks Capelle, the back of his head is gone.

Bullets pummel the mud beside him and Alain spins and rolls into a crater where he finds Sgt. Trezeguet lying half in and out of a pool of water.

Sgt. Trezeguet is bleeding. Badly. A line of black bullet holes across his chest.

Alain starts first aid with no idea where to begin. He plugs a big wound with his hand.

Sgt. Trezeguet pleads with his eyes for Alain to save him.

BOOM! A grenade goes off at the crater rim, ejecting a hundred pounds of mud that covers them both.

Alain comes up from under it. Digs frantically for his friend. Uncovering a dead Sgt. Trezeguet. Alain groans, drops his head and beats the ground with his fist.

NO-MAN'S-LAND - FROM A HIGH WIDE ANGLE

Encompassing the crossfire, the flashes of gunfire coming in bursts. Sputtering. Falling still.

Lingering over the front, time compresses as DARK NIGHT yields to MISTY DAWN.

In the gray morning light stretcher bearers, tiny from this height, move among the broken ground collecting the dead and wounded.

INT. TRENCHES - DAY

Soldiers stir. Rows of noncoms rise from beneath blankets and ponchos. Crawl out of hovels dug into the trench sides.

Officers emerge from wood-framed dugouts.

PICK-UP ALAIN

Striding through a trench. Past a queue at a field kitchen.

He comes to an area of intersecting trenches. Gets his bearings and moves on.

INT. LT. PAPIN'S QUARTERS - DAY

Lieutenant Papin shaves before a small mirror hung from a post. Behind him two other officers crouch through the entryway on their way out. OFFICER 1 stops and turns.

OFFICER 1

Lieutenant, do you want me to bring you some breakfast?

LT. PAPIN

No, I'm joining my father this morning.

He pauses while shaving and looks over his shoulder.

LT. PAPIN (CONT'D)

Chocolate croissants and quail eggs.
Eat your hearts out.

Officer 1 masks his contempt with a smile, turns and goes.

OUTSIDE THE QUARTERS

He joins the other officer.

OFFICER 1

(twirling his moustache)
His royal high ass will break-fast
with Father. "Croissants and quail
eggs". I hope he chokes on it.

They chuckle and walk off, passing Alain whose mud-encrusted uniform draws a double-take.

INT. LT. PAPIN'S QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

Lieutenant Papin applies toilette water. Turns and finds himself face to face with Alain, caked head to toe in mud.

Lieutenant Papin goes ash white. His eyes dart past Alain to the exit, a way out.

Alain just stands before him glaring.

Words form on Lieutenant Papin's lips, die there. He dashes for the exit. Alain grabs him, wraps him up.

ALAIN

You sonofabitch!

Alain throws him to the floor. Straddles him and pummels him with his fists. Lieutenant Papin flails back. Gets tagged on the chin and goes limp. Alain grabs him by the collar.

ALAIN (CONT'D)

Six good men dead. For what? For what!

Alain slaps him a couple times and Lieutenant Papin revives and immediately starts clawing at Alain who bangs his head hard against the dirt knocking the fight out of him.

Alain stands and looks down at Lieutenant Papin in disgust.

ALAIN (CONT'D)

I'm taking this whole goddamn mess
up to division. You and your father
can answer to them!

At the mention of his father, something feral springs up in Lieutenant Papin and as Alain turns to go he grabs a bayonet draped from a cot and charges.

Alain turns, catches the bayonet hand and twists it behind Lieutenant Papin's back. They struggle. Lieutenant Papin stumbles and falls backward onto the blade.

He groans. Rolls over. Reaches for Alain's feet and dies.

At that moment Big Corporal and another soldier burst in, stunned by what they see.

Go to Alain's reaction and... to the bayonet in Lieutenant Papin's back where blood blossoms on the uniform.

TRIBUNAL GENERAL (V.O.)
Will the defendant rise.

MATCH CUT - TO THE BAYONET

Now tagged as evidence on a table.

TRIBUNAL GENERAL (CONT'D)
Captain Alain LaFrancouer...

Alain stands before a military Tribunal in the converted DRAWING ROOM of a French chateau.

THREE GENERALS seated at a refectory table preside over the proceedings. A pair of French captains serve as prosecutor and defense attorney and two gendarmes man the door. Off to the side a row of chairs are filled with observers. Among them is General Papin.

TRIBUNAL GENERAL (CONT'D)
(middle of the three)
after a thorough review of the evidence, it is the finding of this Tribunal that you are guilty of the murder of a fellow officer and are hereby sentenced to death by firing squad. Sentence to be carried out tomorrow morning at six a.m.

He pounds a gavel.

Alain turns to General Papin who shoots him a withering look. Alain returns Papin's gaze with expressionless eyes.

INT. PRISON CORRIDOR - NIGHT

A GUARD leads a gaunt middle-aged priest, FATHER DESAILLY, down a dark corridor to a cell door and lets him in.

INSIDE THE CELL

Alain sits by a wall, lit by a moonbeam arrowing in through window bars, the finger of God pointing out the accused.

FATHER DESAILLY
(to the guard)
Thank you.

The guard steps out and shuts the door.

FATHER DESAILLY (CONT'D)
Captain, I'm Father Desailly.

Alain casts a weary, side-eyed glance. Looks back to the window. Father Desailly waits near the door, motions toward the floor with his hand.

FATHER DESAILLY (CONT'D)
Mind if I sit?

Alain consents with a tilt of his head, then looks off again into space. The priest sits on the floor across from him.

FATHER DESAILLY (CONT'D)
Your service record says you're Catholic.

ALAIN
Does it? Well, I had to put something down, word was on Sundays the atheists cleaned latrines.

FATHER DESAILLY
A rather apropos use of manpower, don't you think? It's reassuring to know the French army gets something right, now and then.

Father Desailly smiles. Alain answers with a blank stare.

FATHER DESAILLY (CONT'D)
I hear you're from around Soissons. Chevois isn't it? I've spent some time near there when I was-

ALAIN
Father, save it. I'm not buyin'.

FATHER DESAILLY
I've nothing to sell, my son. It's just that when a man is about to face his death... I thought you might want someone to talk to.

Alain shuffles his feet and stares at the floor.

FATHER DESAILLY (CONT'D)
You know you're not the only unfortunate man in this war.

ALAIN
(looks up)
You don't say.

There is a moment.

FATHER DESAILLY

Are you afraid to die?

ALAIN

I've been afraid of dying since I got here.

FATHER DESAILLY

And what of your soul? Have you no fear for it? After all, you killed a man.

ALAIN

I've killed a lot of men, most didn't deserve it as much as he did.

FATHER DESAILLY

My son, whether you realize it or not you need absolution. A short time from now you're going to meet your maker.

ALAIN

I'm not going to meet anyone. If three years on the front has taught me anything - I'm sure of that.

Father DeSailly weighs a response. Alters his tack.

FATHER DESAILLY

I'd like to accompany you tomorrow, if that's all right? I want to pray for the conversion of your soul.

ALAIN

Sure. Why not? What's an execution without a mumbling priest? But keep your distance, will you. Last thing I want is to be looking down the barrel of a gun listening to that.

FATHER DESAILLY

I'll do my best to keep it in mind. God bless you, son.

He stands and knocks on the door. The guard opens it. Suddenly something dawns on Alain.

ALAIN

Hey, Father. You really want to do something for me?

Father Desailly motions to the guard to give him a moment.

FATHER DESAILLY

Yes, of course.

Alain stands and takes a letter from his coat.

ALAIN

Give this to my wife.

FATHER DESAILLY

Won't she be there tomorrow?

ALAIN

I'll be dead before she's even notified.

(off Father DeSailly's look)

Justice is swift for a general's son.

Father Desailly takes the letter.

FATHER DESAILLY

I'll see she gets it.

ALAIN

Thank you.

Alain looks at Father Desailly with quiet respect. The priest leaves and the guard shuts the door.

OUTSIDE THE CELL

Father Desailly pockets Alain's letter. Leaves. The guard detains him. Holds out his hand and flicks two fingers.

GUARD

General Papin's orders.

Father Desailly hesitates, then he hands him the letter and walks out, slamming the door.

OFF THE SLAM

A hammer blow reverberates around the PRISON COURTYARD as two guards nail shackles to a wooden post.

INSIDE ALAIN'S CELL

Alain peers out the window watching the preparations.

Their task complete, the guards walk off chatting unintelligibly.

Alain stares at the firing squad post.

Slides down from the window to the floor with his back to the wall.

LATER

Alain sits watching the door, ash-white, really sweating it out. He fidgets. Gets up and goes to the door.

ALAIN

Hey. Guard.

Alain hears the man stir from a chair and scuff to the door. A slat slides open and the guard's ugly mug appears in the barred porthole.

GUARD

What?

ALAIN

What time is it?

GUARD

Why torture yourself, Captain? Go to sleep.

(off Alain's look)

It's after three. You've got a couple hours. They'll bring you out at five-thirty. It won't be long after that.

Alain searches for something else to say, just to talk to someone. Something sadistic flickers in the guard's eyes, like he's seen it many times before. The slat closes.

ALAIN

Hey!

GUARD

(opening slat,
irritated)

What?

ALAIN

How 'bout a cigarette?

GUARD

You'll get one in the morning. Sweetest you'll ever have. So they say.

He grins coldly and shuts the slat.

Alain walks to the window and looks up at the moon, another cold grin set among the stars.

At the sight of it some of the tension leaves Alain's face. He stares at it for a long quiet moment, then notices -

A strange light arcing in from beyond the moon. The light descends, WHISTLING - loudly. Suddenly it cuts off...

And Alain throws himself to the floor.

A second later a huge shell slams into the CELL next to his and blows the room apart. Obliterating the wall behind the guard in the blink of an eye.

Alain comes up from under debris and staggers through smoke and a door-size hole in the cell wall.

EXT. DEMOLISHED CELL/COURTYARD - NIGHT

He clammers through rubble into the courtyard. Pancakes himself to the ground as more artillery rounds explode nearby.

Massive explosions from German howitzers.

That pummel the compound. Shake the earth beneath Alain and spew fifty-foot geysers of dirt into the air.

Another building takes a direct hit. Flames, concrete and concussive force mushroom across the compound - cutting a fleeing soldier in two, tossing another through the air like a rag doll.

Alain gets to his feet, weaves in a crouch. Hits the dirt again then comes up and leaps through an opening in the shattered prison wall a moment before another shell explodes and the screen fills with flames.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

A plaster statue of Mother Mary -- the embodiment of peace.

Michelle and a girlfriend, VIVIAN (19), kneel on prie-dieus before the statue praying the rosary. The candlelit church is small, a chapel really, and empty but for the women. Mary's statue and one of Joseph bracket the altar where a large crucifix is hung.

The young women bless themselves, rise and leave.

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Rain. Michelle and Vivian emerge from the church.

VIVIAN

Oh no, look at this. I'll be soaked by the time I get home.

MICHELLE

Come home with me, it's much closer. We'll have supper together... Now please, don't say "no". I'd love the company, the house feels like a tomb since Alain left.

Vivian weighs the idea. Decides.

VIVIAN

You better have me back by ten or
Mama will be out looking for me with
her broom.

MICHELLE

If she does we'll turn her loose on
the Germans, it'll shorten the war
by at least a year.

Michelle and Vivian laugh, and with shawls draped overhead
the two women scurry into the lane.

Behind them the horizon is aglow with artillery fire, the
distant RUMBLE of the guns heard under the pattering rain.

EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The two women splash through puddles to the front door.

INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

They enter the foyer, drenched, where they divest themselves
of the wet shawls. Michelle shuts the door on the downpour
and the remote artillery barrage flashing against the sky.

INT. MICHELLE'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Michelle stands before the dresser brushing her hair. Behind
her Vivian slips into a blue dress, the same dress Michelle
wore to see Alain off.

VIVIAN

It fits. Perfectly.

She comes up behind Michelle and looks in the mirror.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)

We look like cousins.

MICHELLE

Sisters.

Michelle sets the brush down on the dresser beside some framed
photos of her and Alain. Vivian takes a photo tucked in the
mirror of Michelle and an older woman in front of an apartment
building.

VIVIAN

Who's this?

MICHELLE

My Aunt Rosa, in Lisbon.

VIVIAN

You're so young.

Michelle takes the picture.

MICHELLE

Sixteen. This was two years before the war. She brought me there after Mother passed, hoping to land me a husband. She had no idea I was already in love.

She gazes at the photo for a moment then puts it back on the mirror, behind a framed picture of her and Alain arm in arm. Turns to Vivian.

VIVIAN

Oh, you don't know how fortunate you were to find Alain before the war. Look at me, I'll be an old maid before I see a man my age again.

In jest, Michelle looks her over for signs of wear and tear.

MICHELLE

I wouldn't despair just yet. Nineteen's terribly old, but you have a few good years left in you, I'm sure.

Vivian smiles at her own foolishness. Michelle takes her by the arm and walks with her out of the room.

INT. DINING ROOM - MICHELLE'S HOME - NIGHT

A bowl of steaming turnips is set on the table. Michelle and Vivian sit and fold their hands for grace.

MICHELLE

Bless us, oh Lord, this welcoming table and in your loving kindness provide life-giving bread to those most unfortunate among us.

BOOM! An artillery shell goes off, distinctly closer. Michelle pauses, looks at Vivian who looks back with eyes bright with apprehension. Michelle closes her eyes and continues the prayer.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Shield our loved ones from danger, Lord. And in accordance with your divine purpose return them safely home to us. Amen.

VIVIAN

Amen.

They pass the food: soup, greens, the turnips - paltry war-time fare. Another BOOM!, this time, very close. Vivian emits a gasp, more like an aborted scream. Michelle makes a visible effort to be calm.

MICHELLE

Viv, the baguette.

Vivian takes the bread with a trembling hand and passes it to Michelle. They resume eating.

BOOM! BOOM! A couple more artillery rounds are heard, now like far-off thunder, as if the danger were receding.

The two women concentrate on their soup. In the strained silence the clinking of the soup spoons resounds like church bells. Michelle notices the empty wine glasses. She pushes back her chair.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

I forgot the wine.

VIVIAN

I'll get it.

Before Michelle can object, Vivian is on her feet and through the open kitchen door behind her.

She grabs a wine bottle on the counter. WAH-BOOM! A tremendous explosion outside the home, rattling the windows and shaking the entire house.

Vivian SCREAMS, tips the wine over and sinks into a crouch.

MICHELLE

Vivian!

The two women lock eyes. A PIERCING WHISTLING approaches the home. Builds to a crescendo...

As the wine bottle rolls slowly off the counter...

Onto the floor, shattering at the exact moment the shell impacts outside the kitchen window.

The massive blast blows in the whole side of the house.

Engulfing Vivian in flames.

Flipping the dining room table onto Michelle - knocking her to the floor, but shielding her from the flaming debris.

EXT. CHEVOIS - NIGHT

The artillery bombardment peppers the village. Annihilating houses in single blasts. Haphazardly - blasting one home, sparing the next, taking out the next two down the street.

VILLAGERS

Flee. On carts, wagons, bicycles.

A battered old truck comes up the road loaded down with family members, pets and a few precious belongings.

Behind it a burly old farmer, YVES LASALLE, escapes leading a donkey-drawn cart.

He passes Michelle's burning home and has to pull up short as Alain's mare bolts past him in a frenzy and gallops up the street. LaSalle steadies his donkey. Starts on again when he's spies something in the rubble of the home - the stark whiteness of a woman's hand.

He stops the cart. Braves the flames and uncovers Michelle.

Behind him in the street, another OLD MAN runs against the flow of fleeing villagers. He stops and comes to aid LaSalle.

OLD MAN
My God! Is she alive?

LASALLE
Yes, I think so. Help me with this.

They lift the dining table off her. Carry her to the cart.

LaSalle examines a small gash on Michelle's brow.

OLD MAN
She needs a doctor.

LaSalle brings out a handkerchief and applies pressure to the cut. A shell explodes across the street and the two men cringe against the cart. The old man gets a look of panic.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
I have to go. I'm sorry... Good luck with her, but I must get to my farm.

He scampers off up the street, toward the assault.

LASALLE
Are you mad? The Germans are coming. You can't go back. Come with us!

The old man turns around.

OLD MAN

No, no! I must get my animals. And my paintings. All I have is there!

He spins back around and hurries off.

LASALLE

Don't be a fool. You'll be killed!

But the old man is already halfway up the street. A shell explodes near him and the concussion knocks him down. He staggers to his feet and runs on through a cloud of smoke.

LaSalle takes the donkey by the reins, heads the other way.

EXT. MEADOW - NIGHT

A lone figure breaks out of the trees and sprints across a grass meadow.

Close on Alain, stopping, catching his breath. Looking anxiously around.

Behind him and to the south the night sky is all aglow from the bombardment, a massive full-on assault that extends up and down this entire sector of the front.

MOMENTS LATER

He jogs through a PASTURE. Ducks under a wire fence and spots a farmhouse at the end of the field.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Alain creeps around the corner of a shed and scans the farmhouse, a two-story wood home draped in darkness. He peers into the shed.

A curing sausage dangles from a beam. With alacrity born of hunger, he rips it down, tears off the casing and eats.

Suddenly, MANLY VOICES drift in on the wind and Alain turns and sees...

A half dozen German soldiers approaching across the field.

He pockets the sausage and scoots into an encroaching line of trees. Hides in low-lying brush, stock-still. Listening. He hears...

The Germans ransacking the house. SHOUTING commands.

A woman CRYING, and someone consoling her. Then after a long silence a spurt of GUNFIRE.

Seconds pass, like an eternity. Alain peers over a bush.

The Germans have moved off, leaving an elderly man and woman dead in the dirt before the home.

Alain stands and walks out of the brush. Suddenly a German soldier rises beside him pulling up his pants.

Alain leaps onto him. Struggles briefly then quickly overpowers the man and cracks his windpipe with his wrist.

The German gurgles on his own blood. Alain releases him, turns him over and only then discovers that it's just a tall, rawboned boy, fifteen-years-old if a day.

The young soldier looks up at Alain, shocked and terrified that his life and all his hopes are slipping away.

Alain holds him while he dies. Staring into the boy's terrified eyes as the young soldier tries to speak, but only gurgles, spews blood... and dies.

Alain lays the dead boy's head on the grass then lurches into the trees.

Racing away, putting as much distance as he can between himself and the foul deed.

Farther into the woods he stops, falls breathlessly against a tree and retches.

EXT. FRENCH CAFE - DAY

A narrow French rue bustles with military activity - soldiers on the march, troop trucks, towed artillery, etc., the French response to the German offensive.

A maroon 1916 Renault DM Tourer pulls up and parks before a small cafe.

The driver steps out and looks around, a dark, broad-shouldered man with a crescent scar on his cheek.

An attractive blonde carrying an infant approaches down the sidewalk. He looks her up and down as she passes, and the woman, catching him gazing, looks sharply away.

The man smirks, watches her walk off, then turns to the cafe.

INT. FRENCH CAFE - DAY

Two hoary old men huddle over drinks at the bar. Near the front, where there's light from the street, a young man in a wheelchair reads a book and a gendarme on break enjoys coffee and madeleines.

At a back table General Papin sits in the shadows sipping a snifter of Courvoisier, perusing a file of photographs.

Close on: a photo of Lieutenant Papin in uniform side by side with his father, the general, graduation day proud.

General Papin drops the photo among others of his son and a service photo of Captain Alain LaFrancouer.

He checks the open front door. Looks anxiously at his watch. Places the photos back into the file and drains his cognac. Stands to leave.

LE CHASSEUR (O.S.)

Where are you off to?

The general turns. Seated at a table behind him is the dark, broad-shouldered man, this is Henri Laval, LE CHASSEUR (the Hunter).

The General's thrown for an instant, unsure of who this is and what he wants. He puts it together, grasps the obvious.

GENERAL PAPIN

You're late. I was just about to leave.

Le Chasseur stares at the general with disconcerting stillness. Even the full-of-himself, slightly intoxicated, General Papin feels the effect. He averts his eyes, pulls out a chair and sits.

The two men sit quietly for a moment measuring one another - the haughty, well-groomed general in his pressed uniform and the wolfish, shabbily-dressed civilian, neither man looking particularly impressed with what he sees.

GENERAL PAPIN (CONT'D)

You've come highly recommended, I hope you won't disappoint me.

LE CHASSEUR

What's the matter, General? Don't like my looks?

GENERAL PAPIN

I don't like being snuck-up on,
(casts a look around)
Or your choice of meeting places.
There are too many people.

Le Chasseur strokes his scar.

LE CHASSEUR

My looks are my looks, I can't do much about that. But I prefer to meet like this, here, face to face, with all these... witnesses. This way, if things go belly up and I need your help, well, you're not so likely to claim we never met. Are you?

A bartender arrives.

LE CHASSEUR (CONT'D)

Courvoisier. Two, for my friend the General and I.

Bartender leaves. Le Chasseur cracks a satisfied smile, having made his point.

LE CHASSEUR (CONT'D)

So what's the job?

GENERAL PAPIN

I want you to track down a deserter. Find him and hold him for me.

LE CHASSEUR

(slightly incredulous)
A deserter?

GENERAL PAPIN

He's an officer.

LE CHASSEUR

One tenth of the French Army has deserted, General, the officers leading the way.

GENERAL PAPIN

This one's wanted for murder... of my son.

Whatever caution Le Chasseur came in with, it falls away with this remark.

LE CHASSEUR

I see. And after I have him?

GENERAL PAPIN

Just contact me when you do.

Le Chasseur studies this remark, then smiles, amused. The bartender drops off the cognacs and leaves.

GENERAL PAPIN (CONT'D)

Here, I'm sure you can make use of these.

He hands Le Chasseur Alain's service photo and the letter for Michelle. Le Chasseur checks the tattered letter with a splotch of the guard's blood on it. Looks at General Papin.

LE CHASSEUR

Is he wounded?

GENERAL PAPIN

Not that I know of. That isn't his blood.

Le Chasseur pockets the letter. Stares at Alain's photo.

LE CHASSEUR

This is the man?

GENERAL PAPIN

Yes. Why?

LE CHASSEUR

He doesn't look the type.

GENERAL PAPIN

What's looks got to do with it?

Le Chasseur grins.

GENERAL PAPIN (CONT'D)

I've put a telephone number on the back of that. No telegrams. And don't try to contact me at Division. If I'm not at that number, just keep trying until you reach me. Understood?

LE CHASSEUR

Yes, General. Nothing through channels.

General Papin takes an envelope filled with notes from his breastcoat and places it on the table.

GENERAL PAPIN

Two thousand francs. Go ahead, count it out.

Le Chasseur counts out twenty hundred franc notes.

GENERAL PAPIN (CONT'D)

How long do you think it will take?

Le Chasseur plucks out an extra hundred from the envelope.

LE CHASSEUR

For expenses.

He stands and pockets the notes. Swirls the cognac and downs it in one gulp.

LE CHASSEUR (CONT'D)

Don't worry, General, living or dead,
I'll find him. I always do.

He sets down the empty snifter and walks out.

EXT. ROAD TO MEAUX - DAY

A ragged procession of refugees from the German offensive travel a dirt road on foot, in animal-drawn wagons and carts.

Michelle sleeps in the back of LaSalle's cart. She wakes up. Sees... A cloudy sky.

LASALLE (O.S.)

So, sleeping beauty awakes.

Michelle turns to LaSalle walking beside her. He takes hold of the donkey.

LASALLE (CONT'D)

Shht, Roy.

The animal halts.

LASALLE (CONT'D)

How's your head? Know what year it is?

Michelle touches the small cut above her brow.

MICHELLE

Where am I?

LASALLE

On the road to Meaux.

Fellow refugees walk by staring: A teen-age girl, a tired old woman, and a man in his thirties missing an arm.

Michelle stares at the man.

MICHELLE

What happened? The last thing I
remember I was having dinner with my
friend...

(suddenly remembers)

Oh, Mother of God, Vivian!

Michelle sobs. LaSalle exchanges a look with the man in his thirties. Ladles water from a keg and offers Michelle.

LASALLE

Here. Drink.

Michelle drinks. Wipes away tears.

MICHELLE

And my home... Dear God, what am I to do?

Lasalle puts an arm around her.

LASALLE

There now, girl. Hey, you're alive. That's a start. And look around you, half the nation is in the same boat.

Michelle looks over at the line of refugees.

MICHELLE

Who are these people?

LASALLE

Townspeople from Soissons, Vauxrot, Bucy-le-Long. The whole east side of the *department*' was attacked. Most of the people from Chevois headed west. I go south, to my sister in Meaux. And if you're to come with me I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to walk for a while. Old Roy here has about had it.

Michelle turns to the sweat-soaked donkey.

MICHELLE

Poor thing.

LASALLE

Aren't we all.

LaSalle helps Michelle off the back of the cart. She stands, swoons. LaSalle holds her upright.

LASALLE (CONT'D)

Steady, girl. Get your feet under you. And here...

He takes a man's short coat from the cart.

LASALLE (CONT'D)

put this on. I don't want you catching your death.

LaSalle helps Michelle into the coat. Face to face like this she recognizes him.

MICHELLE

I know you, you're "Old LaSalle".
Aren't you?

LASALLE

I prefer Yves, but I suppose "Old
LaSalle" will do.

MICHELLE

I use to play on your farm as a girl,
my friends and I.

LASALLE

I know, I remember you, the pretty
little muskrat with the ponytail who
was always raiding my orchards.

He puts two meaty hands on Michelle's shoulders and smiles warmly. It's a dose of medicine for Michelle and it elicits a smile.

MICHELLE

(through tears)
Oh, but you had the most wonderful pears.

LASALLE

Indeed I did. Best in all France...
Come now, think you can walk? It's
a long way to Meaux and I'd like to
get there by sundown. Roy here would
want me to tell you, but he's terribly
afraid of the dark.

LaSalle grins and offers his hand. Michelle takes it and steps away from the cart.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - CHEVOIS - DAY

Alain walks along a dirt road lined with poplars.

At the outskirts of the shelled village he stops in his tracks and stares in stunned silence at the devastation, a swift spasm of pain passing across his face.

EXT. CHEVOIS, IN RUINS - SAME

Alain walks the streets in a daze. Past destroyed homes. The bodies of dead villagers and animals.

He stops beside the charred remains of an over-turned farmer's truck, a black tangle of twisted steel, smoking rubber and charred wood.

His eyes linger on a burnt skeleton that hangs half in and out of the passenger door.

Alain is struck by a terrible fear. He bolts down the road. Runs breathlessly through the village...

ANOTHER ANGLE

Through charred beams, of Alain sprinting down the street. Shortening his stride. Stopping before the smoldering remains of his home.

On Alain, stunned, his face a gray mask.

He walks through the front gate, past a huge crater in the garden and up to the shattered front door. He pulls on the handle and it comes off a hinge and hangs to the side. The crucifix from the earlier scene swinging back and forth on the inside of the door.

INT. ALAIN'S RUINED HOME

Alain walks through what's left of the main room. Frightens a crow that CAWS and takes flight. He searches for any sign of his wife - his face a mixture of hope and dread.

He steps into what's left of the kitchen and stops cold.

Out from beneath a piece of roof extends a young woman's calves, obscenely white against the blackened debris.

Alain looks at... the familiar hem of the blue dress.

He rushes over. Throws aside the piece of roof, then quickly averts his eyes, his face knotted in grief.

Lying before him is a young woman's corpse charred from the thighs up. Alain draws a sharp, painful breath then drops to his knees and sobs uncontrollably.

ALAIN

Michelle!... Oh, chérie!

He falls face-down at her feet and weeps.

EXT. CROSSROADS - DAY

The maroon DM Tourer comes to a stop beside a signpost. Le Chasseur looks out the window and reads the village names. Checks them against Alain's letter to Michelle.

On the signpost: "Chevois".

Le Chasseur turns the car in the direction of Alain's village.

EXT. BACKYARD - ALAIN'S RUINED HOME - DAY

A shovelful of dirt lands on a freshly dug grave. Alain, in an undershirt, drops the spade and stares for a long moment at his wife's resting place.

He takes a rose from a nearby bush and lays it on the grave. Lingers for a moment then turns and walks away.

INT. ALAIN'S RUINED HOME - BEDROOM - SAME

He opens a dresser drawer and removes civilian clothes. A pack of cigarettes.

MOMENTS LATER

Alain, dressed as a civilian, sits on a half-burnt bed smoking a cigarette. He looks around the wrecked bedroom.

On the floor, the photo of Michelle in Lisbon with her aunt. He picks it up, stares briefly at it then places it in his shirt pocket.

LIVING ROOM

Alain weaves through the debris to the front door where he stops and stares at the dangling crucifix. He rips the door off its hinge in a fit of rage and throws it onto the garden path, the crucifix clattering on the stones as it falls.

Alain storms out, inadvertently and with no concern, kicking the crucifix out of his way as he goes. He pauses at the front gate, tosses aside the cigarette and enters the street.

LATER

The maroon DM Tourer turns onto Alain's street. Rolls slowly to a stop before the wrecked home. Le Chasseur steps out. Verifies the address on the gate. And walks into

ALAIN'S RUINED HOME

Le Chasseur searches, intently, eyeing every detail, missing nothing. He enters the

DINING ROOM

And kneels over a bloodstain on the hardwood floor. Looks at a piece of roof that appears to have been tossed aside

A set of footprints on the floor.

Le Chasseur thinks.

MASTER BEDROOM

Le Chasseur enters and finds Alain's discarded prison uniform.

EXT. ALAIN'S RUINED HOME - DAY

Le Chasseur emerges from the home, moving quickly.

He stops at the gate and looks up and down the street. Out of the corner of his eye he spots the faint red glow of a cigarette.

He kneels and watches as the last ember goes out.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - OUTSKIRTS OF CHEVOIS - DAY

Alain walks listlessly with tear streaks on his dusty cheeks. In b.g. a small dark mass appears, growing larger in the frame, coming into focus as the Maroon Tourer in unhurried pursuit.

The vehicle stops beside Alain, who turns to Le Chasseur pointing a pistol, smiling mirthlessly.

MOMENTS LATER

Alain is thrust up against the car. Handcuffed behind his back. Shoved into the back seat. Legs secured with a rope.

Le Chasseur searches him. Finds the picture of Michelle with her aunt. He flips the photo over and reads:

"Aunt Rosa, Lisbon 1912"

He pockets the photo then takes out a couteau, a large double-edged knife, and cuts a small "C" in Alain's cheek.

ALAIN

(winces)

Son-of-a-bitch.

LE CHASSEUR

Shut-up...

(speaks in his ear)

Remember, Captain, nothing says I have to bring you in alive.

He smacks Alain with the knife hilt and knocks him out.

INT. LE CHASSEUR'S CAR - DAY

A blurred mass of green comes into focus as trees rushing by outside the car window.

Alain rolls over on the seat, smearing blood on the tan leather. Le Chasseur turns and looks.

LE CHASSEUR

Sit up.

Alain lies there.

LE CHASSEUR (CONT'D)

Sit up! You're getting blood on my seat.

Alain swings his feet down and shifts to an upright position against the passenger side door. Le Chasseur looks at him in the rear-view mirror.

LE CHASSEUR (CONT'D)

Don't take it so hard, Captain. You were never going to get very far.

Alain looks out the window, his mind a million miles away.

LE CHASSEUR (CONT'D)

Still, I would think an officer would have had more smarts than to go straight home.

He checks Alain in the mirror - the verbal dart has missed. As if challenged by this Le Chasseur tries another tack.

LE CHASSEUR (CONT'D)

And what a pity, to find it like that. Such a fine place too.

He sucks his teeth in false regret.

Alain looks in the mirror at Le Chasseur, who smiles wickedly and lifts his chin at him in a gesture of acknowledgment.

Le Chasseur takes Michelle's picture from his pocket.

LE CHASSEUR (CONT'D)

And your wife...

(lets out a low whistle)

Such a dish. And to think you threw away a life with her over a spat with a general's whelp... What a waste. What a terrible waste.

Alain stares daggers at Le Chasseur.

LE CHASSEUR (CONT'D)

I'll tell you what, Captain, I'll make a deal with you. If you cooperate
(MORE)

LE CHASSEUR (CONT'D)
and don't give me any trouble, I'll
find your wife for you. I'll look
after her when you're gone, see to
it that all her personal needs are
taken care of. What do you say?

Le Chasseur looks in the mirror and cracks a devilish grin.
Alain lifts his feet off the floor with the idea of kicking
Le Chasseur.

LE CHASSEUR (CONT'D)
Go ahead, Captain, kick me.
(turns)
And I'll cut off your feet.

Alain lowers his legs. Le Chasseur turns back as a loose
horse suddenly runs into the road - Alain's piebald mare of
all animals.

He swerves the car. Clips the animal, which flips into the
air and smashes against the windshield.

The Renault careens off the road into a tree.

Le Chasseur slams into the dash, knocked out. Alain thrown
back and forth against the seats.

First to recover, Alain sits up. Le Chasseur passed-out
over the wheel. Alain tucks into a ball. Pulls the handcuffs
around his feet and out in front of him.

Reaches over and plucks the key and Michelle's picture from
Le Chasseur's pocket. He frees his hands, stores the picture
in his shirt pocket and unties his feet as Le Chasseur comes
to in a fog.

Alain whips the rope off his legs. Throws open the door.
Le Chasseur draws his gun and turns.

Alain dives out the open door, scrambles to his feet and
runs zigzag into the trees as Le Chasseur gets off a couple
wild shots.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Alain races through the woods. Le Chasseur in pursuit,
weaving between the trees, getting glimpses of Alain, but
not enough for a clear shot. He fires anyway.

Alain clears the trees and comes out onto a MEADOW. He
crosses it. Le Chasseur in view behind him, long-striding
it through the grass.

Alain reaches a small embankment.

Climbs it. Up to a...

TRAIN TRESTLE

Where he runs across a wide-stream, his footsteps clamoring off the tracks. Soon, another set of FOOTSTEPS is heard behind him. Alain looks back...

Le Chasseur runs after him, breathless. He stops, takes aim and fires.

The bullet clips Alain's calf and he spins and falls. Le Chasseur walks toward him, reloading.

Suddenly a loud WHISTLE cuts the air and a steam-spewing freight train rounds a bend behind them.

Le Chasseur leaps aside and rolls down the embankment just out of the way of the oncoming train.

Alain looks to jump in the stream... Jagged rocks protrude from the water below.

So he takes off, limping. Trying desperately for the far end of the bridge as the train bears down on him. Reaches him. And he leaps off the track into the stream.

Landing safely in a pocket of water along the rocky bank. The freight train roars past overhead.

ACROSS STREAM

Le Chasseur scampers up the embankment. Turns and looks at

Alain hobbling up the far bank. Catching the train. Hauling himself into a boxcar a few cars ahead of the caboose.

Le Chasseur reads the number on the caboose.

EXT. ROAD TO MEAUX - WOODED AREA - DAY

A dozen refugees rest by the side of the road. Michelle among them, resting on grass beneath a chestnut tree in the full turn of autumn. The golden light bathes her, clarifies her loveliness. Nearby, Roy has his fill of the lush blades.

LaSalle walks up from out of the trees with a shirtful of plums. He selects a couple and dumps the rest in the wagon. Comes and hands one to Michelle.

LASALLE

It's not much of a lunch, but they're ripe and hopefully free of worms.

MICHELLE

Thank you.

LaSalle sits with her and eats.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

How much farther do we have to go?

LASALLE

Oh, about ten kilometers, give or take.

MICHELLE

You're very kind to help me like this.

LaSalle shrugs, unconvinced.

LASALLE

When we get there let me do the talking. My sister's a good woman, but a rough sort. I'm sure she'll put you up for a time, but she'll want to know your plans.

MICHELLE

I'm afraid I haven't any, other than to get word to my husband at the front.

LASALLE

What about your parents, your husband's family?

MICHELLE

My parents have passed and my husband's an orphan.

LASALLE

And you have no brothers or sisters?

MICHELLE

I'm afraid not, just an aunt in Lisbon.

LASALLE

Well, you're better off for it. I've five brothers and sisters and only on speaking terms with one, and she just to argue.

MICHELLE

You have some boys too, don't you? Older boys, if I remember right, and one about my age.

LASALLE

I had three sons. You're thinking of Guy.

MICHELLE

Oh, yes, Guy, that was his name. A tall boy and a little shy. Several girls in the lower class were hopelessly stuck on him... Where is he now?

LASALLE

Dead, he and his brothers, all killed at Verdun.

MICHELLE

Oh, I'm so sorry.

All at once, as if on some unseen signal, the refugees around them abruptly stand and gather their things. LaSalle notices.

LASALLE

What's the hurry?

A moment later he receives an answer when two men step out of the trees, rough-looking characters with soiled clothes, unshaved faces and pistols in their belts.

Michelle looks to Lasalle.

LASALLE (CONT'D)

(sotto voce)

Deserters.

An old couple up front tries to hurry away.

DESERTER #1

Hey, you there! Where do you think you're going?

The couple stops.

DESERTER #1 (CONT'D)

That's no way to greet two brave soldiers returning from the front. Where's our hero's welcome, eh?

The couple wave nervously and continue on.

DESERTER #1 (CONT'D)

Stay where you are! Get over here with the others. All of you... Here!

He motions for them to gather together. Deserter #2 draws his pistol and corrals them, roughly prodding the slow-movers with the gun.

The refugees form a row and collectively hold their breath.

Deserter #1 scans their frightened faces.

DESERTER #1 (CONT'D)

My countrymen.

He nods to his partner and he searches a middle-aged woman at the end of the row. She screams and Deserter #2 steps back and stares at her like she's half-mad.

DESERTER #2

What are you so afraid of? We're not le boche. And we've done our part for the war. Now you can do yours.

He takes her ring. Searches her pockets and comes up with a small wad of francs.

DESERTER #1

All of you, turn out your pockets, purses too. And don't forget the jewelry.

He waves the pistol and the refugees comply.

Michelle slips off her wedding ring. Lets it fall to the grass and steps on it. LaSalle stands with his hands at his side. Deserter #2 crosses to him.

DESERTER #2

What's with you? You heard him.

LASALLE

I haven't anything for you to take. Unless you want my ass?

He glances at Roy then looks hard at Deserter #2.

Deserter #2 sizes him up: LaSalle is old, deep into his sixties, but he's a brawny, steady-eyed man who stands before the robber like a block of granite.

Deserter #2 looks at the donkey and smiles.

DESERTER #2

So you think you're funny, old man? Or are you just trying to play it tough for the girl? Bet I know what you have in mind for her.

LASALLE

You swine.

In a flash, Deserter #2 hits LaSalle on the head with the pistol. LaSalle collapses and Deserter #2 kicks him.

MICHELLE

Stop it! Stop it! For God's sake
let him be.

Michelle grabs Deserter #2.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

What's wrong with you? He's just an
old man!

He shoves Michelle hard to the ground and points the gun at her, his face flushed with rage.

DESERTER #1

Val!

Deserter #2 turns sharply with a wildness in his eyes that suggests his friend should choose his words carefully.

DESERTER #1 (CONT'D)

Never mind her.
(re: the money and jewelry)
C'mon, grab the stash. Let's go!

Deserter #2 tucks the gun in his belt and collects the cash and jewelry. Deserter #1 keeping watch with the gun. His gaze lingering on Michelle.

DESERTER #1 (CONT'D)

Get up.

Michelle rises with her eyes locked on Deserter #1.

Deserter #2 finishes collecting the take, wraps it in a handkerchief and comes and hands it to Deserter #1.

Deserter #1 pockets the loot and puts his pistol in his belt. Walks right up in Michelle's face. Michelle turns away. He turns her back by her chin.

DESERTER #1 (CONT'D)

And what have you got for me? Hmm?
For a lonely soldier too long at the
front.

He plucks off her earrings then slides his hands over her, copping a feel under the guise of searching. Michelle slaps his hand away. He grabs her by the hair and pulls her with him into the brush.

DESERTER #1 (CONT'D)
(to Deserter #2)
Keep an eye on them.

He takes Michelle into the trees, to a small CLEARING out of sight of the others where he throws her to the ground. Unbuckles his pants. A horrified Michelle moves backward on the ground until she's stopped by the trunk of a tree.

Deserter #1 comes toward her with an animal lust in his eyes.

In the distance puffs of black smoke rise over an open field. The FAINT CHUGGING of a train engine drifts in on a breeze.

Deserter #2 runs up.

DESERTER #2
A train!

Deserter #1 looks at the approaching train. Back at Michelle, torn as to what to do. He spots a silver chain around her neck - her rosary.

He buckles his pants then reaches down and rips the rosary from around her neck. Michelle cries out and reaches after it from her knees.

MICHELLE
No! Not that! Give it back, please!

Deserter #1 fends her off, amused.

Deserter #2 looks anxiously back and forth between his comrade and the approaching train.

DESERTER #2
Come on!

Deserter #1 shakes off Michelle and she lays there and sobs.

DESERTER #1
Oh, come now, cherie, better to lose
a trinket than the crown jewels, eh?

He laughs, and with Deserter #2 tugging at his side, turns and runs off toward the approaching train.

Michelle wipes her tears. Stands and walks out of the brush.

Once in the wooded area, she gets on her hands and knees and searches for her ring. She finds it. Puts it on and sobs. The old woman comes over and helps her to her feet.

OLD WOMAN

Come, my dear. They've gone. It's all right now.

MICHELLE

No, it isn't. Nothing's right. Nothing in this whole world is right!

INT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

A one-horse train station where a diminutive CLERK reads a newspaper at his desk. A small article near the bottom of the back page reads: "Pilgrims Flock To Portugal".

He looks up as a damaged maroon Tourer comes to a stop in the street out front. Le Chasseur enters.

TRAIN STATION CLERK

Good day, Monsieur. May I help you?

Le Chasseur scans the room. Focuses on the train schedules hung on the wall.

INT. BOXCAR - DAY

Sunlight filters through the boxcar slats illuminating the dusty air and Alain down on one knee, utterly spent after his flight. He rolls up his pant leg. Checks his wound - a two-inch gash in his calf.

He tears out a pant pocket. Tears it into a strip and ties the makeshift bandage around his leg.

Someone COUGHS. Alain freezes and peers into the dark corners of the car. Another MUFFLED COUGH comes out of the dark.

Alain looks around for a weapon, settles for a small piece of wood. Moves cautiously toward a dark corner of the car.

SOFT WHEEZING emanates from behind a crate.

ALAIN

Who's there?

The wheezing stops. Alain tosses the crate aside and discovers a ten-year-old boy tucked in a ball holding a pocketknife in front of him.

This is EMILE DUFAY, a wispy, dark-eyed boy covered in grime. He shoots a challenging look at Alain and sets his jaw like a terrier defending a bone. All for show, a mere patina of confidence that fails to conceal the child's genuine fright.

EMILE

One more step and I swear I'll split
you open.

Alain straightens and tosses aside the piece of wood.

ALAIN

Relax, boy. I won't hurt you.

Alain takes a half-step back. Gives a look like "Is this good enough?". The boy remains at full guard. Alain backs up to the boxcar wall and sits. Emile lowers the knife.

ALAIN (CONT'D)

(looks around)

Are you alone?

Emile just stares, maintaining his hard facade, but the trembling knees tell another story.

ALAIN (CONT'D)

My name's Alain. What's yours?

EMILE

Emile. Emile Dufay.

ALAIN

You're French?

EMILE

Belgian.

Alain stretches out his legs, gets comfortable.

ALAIN

Mind if I share the car?

EMILE

Do I have a choice?

Alain smiles, charmed by the boy's stern veneer.

ALAIN

Any idea where we're going?

EMILE

South. Spain I should think.

The boy's eyes dart to some stacked crates. On the crates black stenciled lettering reads: "SALAMANCA".

Alain puts his head against the boxcar wall and stares into space, lost in thought. Emile watches him, curious. After a beat, Alain comes out of it and looks at the boy.

ALAIN

Where're your parents?

EMILE

That's none of your...

He breaks into a hacking cough. Spits.

Alain notices the brown tint of blood in the sputum. He looks more closely at the boy, the dark circles under his eyes, his sallow complexion. Emile is ill.

ALAIN

That's a nasty cough. How long have you had that?

Emile pulls out a flask of brandy, drinks. His watery eyes clear and he throws his challenging look again.

EMILE

What's it to you? And stop staring. What do I have, two heads?

Alain smiles faintly and looks away.

EXT. ROAD TO MEAUX - DAY

Michelle, seated in the grass, ties a bandage around LaSalle's head. They're alone, the others have moved on, the sun low in the western sky suggesting the passage of a few hours.

MICHELLE

There, that should do it. Can you walk? It's getting dark, and cold.

LASALLE

I can walk. It was just a little knock on the head, nothing more.

LaSalle stands. It's an effort for him and Michelle helps. Once on his feet he gives Michelle a slight nod of thanks, with a touch of embarrassment about it.

He walks away, toward Roy and his small cart.

INT. BOXCAR - DAY

Viewed through a cracked open boxcar door, two railroad men walk beside the train toward a water tower.

Alain shuts the and over at Emile dozing in the warm glow of sunbeams that slant through holes in the boxcar. The air is still, the train too, stopped to take on water.

Alain watches the boy, staring at length at his dirt-stained face, his angelic features, his wheezing chest.

A WHISTLE BLOWS. The train lurches, waking Emile.

He looks around disoriented. Looks up at Alain suspiciously, as if knows he's been watching him.

Emile takes out the brandy and drinks.

EMILE

How long was I out?

ALAIN

Not long, a few minutes.

Emile comes over beside Alain, peeks out a knothole.

EMILE

Where are we?

ALAIN

You tell me, I haven't a clue. I've never been so turned around.

EMILE

We must be nearing Amiens, or Clermont.

ALAIN

How would you know that? Been here before?

EMILE

I've never left Belgium, but I can read a map, and I've planned this trip down to the last detail.

Emile coughs. He turns around and slumps to the floor an arm's length from Alain, sweating.

Alain sits. Studies Emile.

ALAIN

You don't look so good, kid. Maybe you should see a doctor.

EMILE

I'm not a kid, that's a goat, and I've seen a doctor, at the orphanage. The old fart sent for a priest. Said "I was getting weaker, that I wouldn't last long".

(looks squarely at Alain)

But here I am.

Alain studies him with a smile. Emile swigs the brandy.

ALAIN

You know that isn't going to help?

EMILE

It doesn't hurt. What do you know anyway? Are you a doctor?. I know what to do, better than you or any...

He waves a hand into space, not bothering to finish the thought. He turns a shoulder toward Alain, confides in him.

EMILE (CONT'D)

I'm going to Portugal, to Fatima.

He takes out a newspaper clipping. Shows Alain.

A back page article reads: "CHILDREN CLAIM VIRGIN MARY VISITS FATIMA, PORTUGAL". Accompanying it is a small black and white photo of three peasant children - seven and ten-year-old girls and a nine-year-old boy.

EMILE (CONT'D)

Mother Mary will come again on the thirteenth, for the last time. Lucia...

(points out the oldest girl)
says Mary has promised a great sign so all may believe. She will cure me. Better than any doctor.

Emile carefully folds up the article and puts it away. Alain studies the boy with a smile, finds a delicate response.

ALAIN

Portugal's a long way, Emile. Why not get some medicine first, then go?

EMILE

What do you take me for, a fool? The first adult who gets his hands on me will send me back.

ALAIN

What about me? Think I'll send you back?

EMILE

You're a deserter, you won't do a thing to risk your own skin. Your being here proves that.

Emile locks a gaze on Alain. Alain weighs explaining.

Suddenly the boxcar door is thrown open and a breathless man climbs into the car. He turns and grabs the hand of another man running after the train, hauls him up. Shuts the door.

Emile looks at Alain, who touches Emile - remain calm.

The two deserters catch their breath. Deserter #1 turns.

Alain comes to his feet and stands protectively before Emile.

DESERTER #1

Easy now, friend. Easy... Just hitching a ride. Like you.

(breaths deeply)

Whew! Chasing trains... is for young pups... not an old dog like me.

Alain eyes him warily.

DESERTER #1 (CONT'D)

Don't mind if we join you, do you?

ALAIN

There's plenty of room.

DESERTER #1

Yes. That's for sure, but sadly...

(opens his hands)

not many beds.

He grins disarmingly, runs his eyes over Alain - sees: He's unarmed. Deserter #1 draws his pistol.

DESERTER #1 (CONT'D)

Search them.

Alain rakes the car with a gaze, looking for a means of defense. There is none, so he slowly lifts his hands.

Deserter #2 searches Alain. Finds Michelle's photo, tosses it aside. A half-eaten sausage, which he smells, puts back.

Emile draws his pocket knife, palms it.

Deserter #2 shoves Alain to the floor.

DESERTER #2

Sit down.

He searches Emile, finds a little cash and the brandy.

DESERTER #2 (CONT'D)

Hey now, what have we here?

He shows the brandy to his friend. Uncorks and drinks.
Tosses it to Deserter #1.

Deserter #1 takes a swig, eyeing Alain as he drinks, taking particular notice of his boots.

DESERTER #1
On the run, eh?
(off Alain's look)
Any thick-headed gendarme could peg
you for a deserter with those on.

He points at the boots with the bottle. Suddenly Emile bursts into a cough. He doubles over, spits up phlegm.

DESERTER #2
What's wrong with the boy?

ALAIN
He's got a cold.

DESERTER #2
He sounds contagious.

DESERTER #1
Relax, stupid, it sounds like
pneumonia. Far on too, I'd say.

EMILE
It's not emoania! What would a coward
like you know anyway?

DESERTER #1
Watch your tongue, boy, or I'll slice
it off and make me a stew.

ALAIN
There's no need to frighten the boy.

EMILE
(glares)
I'm not scared by the likes of him.

Deserter #1 chuckles.

DESERTER #1
No? That's good. Never be afraid
of another man, son. For what can
he really do to you? Huh? End your
miserable existence?
(snorts)
I'd thank him for that. Get me off
this godforsaken planet for good, and
send me someplace, anyplace, but here.

EMILE

Hell is the only place you're going.

DESERTER #1

I've been there, son, been there.
And I'm not going back.

DESERTER #2

Look at his cheek.

Deserter #1 notices the c-shaped cut on Alain's face. Curious, he comes over and takes a closer look. Runs the barrel of the gun over the cut. Alain winces.

DESERTER #1

Fresh, eh? And where did you come
by such a fine souvenir?

ALAIN

Shrapnel.

DESERTER #1

Ha! No need to lie, friend. Only
one man marks a soldier like that -
Henri Laval, the Hunter.
(thinks)
You escaped from him?

Alain gives an almost imperceptible nod of the head, "yes".

DESERTER #1 (CONT'D)

Now I'm impressed. Big man? Fancy
red car?

ALAIN

Friend of yours?

DESERTER #1

Oh, no...
(glances at his friend)
no friend of mine. But I know of
him, every mother's son on the run
should. A corrupt detective from
Marseilles before the war, until he
was thrown out for getting a little
too friendly with arrested women.
Now he's the best professional tracker
in France. But it's "Go to the devil
Vauvert" to get him...
(rubs his thumb against
two fingers)
Very pricey. And ruthless, he's
been known to go through a man's
whole family to get to him.

ALAIN

So now what?

DESERTER #1

Now? Nothing.

He steps back with an open arm.

DESERTER #1 (CONT'D)

You're free to go. And good luck to you. You'll need it.

He toasts him with the brandy and takes a drink. Looks at Deserter #2, who throws open the boxcar door.

ALAIN

And the boy?

DESERTER #1

Uh, uh, stays with me. He'll be good cover... until he drops dead.

He waves the pistol. Alain steps up to the door.

Emile opens the knife behind his back.

Alain looks out at the ground rushing by. Hesitating. Deserter #1 nods to Deserter #2 to push him out.

Emile thinks, jumps up. Stabs Deserter #1 in his gun hand.

The pistol drops to the floor and fires. Alain spins, cuffs Deserter #2 on the back of the neck and tosses him out.

Deserter #1 drops the brandy and reaches for the gun, but Alain sweeps the bottle out the door with his foot.

They come to grips. Gouging at eyes. Exchanging blows. Throwing one another off the boxcar walls...

And before the open door where Alain grabs hold of the handle. Deserter #1 pushes him out and Alain dangles off the side of the train.

Emile rushes up and jabs the pocketknife into Deserter #1's back. He wheels and backhands the boy who flies across the car, dropping the knife.

Alain pulls himself in, and lets fly with his fists.

Deserter #1 doubles over and Alain finishes him with a knee to the chin, knocking him cold.

Alain takes a breath, then goes to Emile on the floor who is bent over and gasping for air. He sets him against a wall.

Locates the brandy on the floor and gives Emile a drink.

Emile's breathing levels off.

ALAIN
That was foolish.

EMILE
One of us had to do something.

He grins at Alain who looks warmly at his tough little friend.

ALAIN
Hang on, I'm going to clear the air.

Alain drags Deserter #1 next to the open door, pauses and looks at his boots. Measures his own against them -- they're slightly larger, but he removes them anyway.

He goes through the man's pockets and comes up with the handkerchief filled with cash and jewelry. Among the jewelry he notices Michelle's rosary.

He examines it - the familiar silver amulet with a picture of the Virgin Mary attached to the beads, the reshaped clasp.

He grabs Deserter #1 and slaps him awake.

ALAIN (CONT'D)
Where did you get this?

Deserter #1 drifts. Alain shakes him.

ALAIN (CONT'D)
Where?!

Deserter #1 comes fully awake, looks at the rosary, and Alain's face flushed with rage.

DESERTER #1
Off a girl.

ALAIN
What girl?! Where?!

DESERTER #1
Out on the road. She was heading south. I don't know, we robbed a group of people, refugees.

Alain picks up Emile's pocketknife off the floor and puts it to Deserter #1's eye.

ALAIN
Did you touch her? Did you touch her!

DESERTER #1

No, Monsieur. No! I swear... On my mother's grave I never laid a hand on her.

Alain's eyes bore into him, searching for the truth. Satisfied, he hauls him to his feet before the open door.

DESERTER #1 (CONT'D)

No, wait. Where are my boots?... At least let me jump-

Alain heaves him out.

EXT. BOXCAR - DAY

Deserter #1 comes flying off the train. Tumbles down an embankment and rolls to a stop in a cloud of dust.

INT. BOXCAR - SAME

Alain slams the door. Turns and stares at Emile, processing the events of the last few minutes.

Emile picks up the picture thrown away in the search and hands it to Alain.

EMILE

Is this your wife?

Alain nods.

EMILE (CONT'D)

She's very pretty.

Alain stares at the photo:

Michelle stands arm in arm with Aunt Rosa, smiling. On the building behind them the partial view of a sign reads: "DeCosta Resta..."

Alain turns the photograph over. The backside of the photo reads: "Aunt Rosa, Lisbon 1912".

ALAIN

(thinking)

She was heading south...

He turns to Emile.

ALAIN (CONT'D)

Portugal.

EXT. ROAD TO MEAUX - TWILIGHT

Michelle and LaSalle travel a country road toward a weak westering sun.

EXT. MEAUX - NIGHT

They enter Meaux, a somnolent little town of red-brick and narrow, winding roads. It's cold. Michelle and LaSalle hold their coats tight to their chests, their frosty breath forming clouds around their heads.

EXT. LASALLE'S SISTER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

They halt before a small house with a low white picket fence and stone walkway.

LaSalle knocks on the door. An unkempt, churlish woman in her forties answers holding an infant.

LASALLE

Hello, Marie.

MARIE stares blankly at her brother.

INT. LASALLE'S SISTER'S HOUSE - DAY

Michelle stands in the main room off the kitchen, a disheveled, tight living space with tattered old furniture and clashing bric-a-brac. Two three-year-old girls, twins perhaps, are tucked under blankets on a couch, sucking their thumbs, eyeing Michelle with unabashed curiosity.

An old woman in the corner sits in a rocker mumbling to herself, drooling. The spittle drops unnoticed onto her gnarled, clenched hands.

Two little boys suddenly rush in and out of the room, SHOUTING. A twelve-year-old girl comes in, in pursuit, carrying the infant. She stops mid-step and smiles wanly at Michelle then continues on after the boys.

In the kitchen, through an open doorway, LaSalle and Marie engage in a WHISPERED DISCUSSION. LaSalle pleads. Marie objects. Then in a sudden outburst...

MARIE

I can't feed the people here!

LaSalle puts out a hand to shush her. The word "QUIET" filters in to Michelle. She looks around at the skinny kids, the makeshift beds, the old woman staring blankly into space.

Michelle removes LaSalle's short coat and sets it on a chair.

EXT. LASALLE'S SISTER'S HOME - NIGHT

She hurries out of the home.

Lasalle comes out of the kitchen, picks up the coat and rushes after her.

LASALLE
Michelle! Michelle, wait!...

Michelle stops on the sidewalk beyond the gate.

LASALLE (CONT'D)
Please, let me talk with her. Don't
go off like this.

Michelle looks past him to the house. Marie is watching them from the door of the home, guarding it against a last minute change of heart.

MICHELLE
It's fine. I understand. Really I
do. You've been very kind and I
can't thank you enough for what you've
done, but she's right, there isn't
room. I should go.

She turns to go. LaSalle detains her.

LASALLE
Go? Where? You've no money and you
don't know a soul around here.

MICHELLE
I'll go to the church. In the morning
I'll contact my husband.

LASALLE
Stay here for the night. I don't
give a damn what she says.

MICHELLE
But I do. Thank you. Goodbye.

She turns and walks away.

LASALLE
Michelle!

He comes after her pulling a wad of francs from within his pants. He takes half the notes and stuffs them in her hand.

LASALLE (CONT'D)
You take this. It isn't much but it
should get you to Lisbon, to your aunt.

MICHELLE

No, I couldn't.

LASALLE

Now don't argue with me. For God's sake I couldn't live with myself if I sent you off into the cold night without a franc. The whole thing's so barbaric. And here take this coat, it's freezing.

Michelle takes the coat and put it on. Looks at the money, pockets it, her eyes brimming with tears. Smiles...

MICHELLE

So you bluffed those bandits.

LASALLE

What's a little blow on the head?

MICHELLE

(strokes his face)

You're a good man. Thank you.

She leaves and LaSalle watches her walk away. He turns to his sister who gives him an icy stare then goes back inside.

EXT. STREET - MEAUX - NIGHT

Down on the corner Michelle stops in the pale conical light of a gas lamppost. She wipes her tears and looks down an intersecting street.

All the dwellings appear shut-tight for the night, walled-in and unwelcomingly cold. The total impression is one of complete abandonment as if the whole world has turned its back on her.

Michelle holds the short coat tight about her and steps out onto the dark, shiny street.

EXT. CHURCH - MEAUX - NIGHT

Michelle crosses a street before an old church.

Walks by the church graveyard, through a low wrought iron gate, then under a splayed stone entrance where she opens a wooden door.

INT. CHURCH - MEAUX - NIGHT

The quaint French-Gothic church is empty, tomblike and dimly lit by free-standing candelabras placed along the walls and on either side of the altar.

Michelle slides into a pew near the back and lies down, exhausted. As she drifts off to sleep she looks out the open end of the pew at a small shrine with a statue of the Virgin Mary.

A plaque beneath it reads: "I CANNOT PROMISE YOU HAPPINESS IN THIS WORLD, ONLY THE NEXT... OUR LADY OF LOURDES".

Michelle closes her eyes and sleeps.

EXT. FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

Alain's train rushes across a moonlit plain.

INT. TRAIN - NIGHT

A sausage on the end of Emile's knife cooks over a rusty can filled with straw. The grease drips, sizzles in the flame.

Emile sits beside Alain watching him twirl the meat over the flame. Alain cleans a spot on the floor with his sleeve. Cuts the sausage in two and offers some to Emile.

They pass the brandy back and forth as they feast.

ALAIN

Good?

EMILE

Good.

Alain takes out his last, bent cigarette and lights it. Emile gives him a "How-about-it?" Look.

ALAIN

What do you want with this? Worst thing for you.

Emile's blank expression speaks volumes and Alain passes him the smoke. Emile takes a drag. Coughs, really hacks it up.

ALAIN (CONT'D)

What'd I tell you?

Emile's coughing bout ends. He wipes his mouth, comes up with bloody spittle on the back of his hand and wipes it quickly on his pants so Alain won't see.

EMILE

I wonder what time it is?

ALAIN

Late enough. You should get some sleep.

EMILE

What are you now, my papa?

ALAIN

Suit yourself.

Alain shifts his wounded leg and goes stiff with pain. He pulls up the pant and removes his makeshift bandage. NOTE: He now wears Deserter #1's boots.

The wound is caked with dried blood and badly swollen.

He touches it and winces. Tosses aside the dirty bandage then tears out another pocket and wraps the wound tight. All the while Emile watches.

EMILE

How'd you get that? Did they shoot you when you ran away? Serves you right for leaving your friends.

ALAIN

What makes you think I have any friends?

Alain stuffs out the cigarette butt and lays down with his arm under his head and his back to Emile.

He takes out Michelle's picture. Stares at it as if trying to remember every facet of her face. He puts it away.

Emile watches this. Thinks for a moment then lays down facing the back of Alain's head. After a few seconds his hand creeps up and is placed ever so lightly against Alain's coat.

INT. CAFE #2 - NIGHT

A quaint cafe. A middle-aged couple leaves a window table and exits. At a corner table, Le Chasseur, now the lone customer, sops up some sauce with a bit of bread.

Behind the bar a burly BARTENDER reads a newspaper and a curvaceous WAITRESS rings up a sale.

She goes to the window table and removes the plates, pausing to look out at Le Chasseur's car parked on the street.

She looks at the bartender and again at the car. The bartender checks out the expensive car with the shattered windshield and Le Chasseur linking the two.

The waitress dumps the plates in a tub and takes a pot of coffee to Le Chasseur.

WAITRESS

More coffee?

She smiles. He offers the cup and she refills it, pressing her thigh against his knee as she pours.

Le Chasseur looks her up and down as she takes his plate and gives him a bird's eye view of her considerable cleavage.

She takes the plate to the tub. The bartender folds up his paper and comes out from behind the bar.

BARTENDER

I'll be back. Keep an eye on things.

WAITRESS

Where are you going at this hour?

BARTENDER

I don't pay you to mind my business, do I? Just do your job, and don't smoke all my cigarettes.

The waitress sneers at his back as he walks out. She takes a cigarette from a pack on the counter and lights it. Locks eyes with Le Chasseur and directs his gaze toward some stairs.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

The waitress and Le Chasseur kiss passionately. He opens her blouse. She unbuckles his belt. They fall on the bed.

Suddenly the door bursts open and the bartender enters brandishing a cudgel.

BARTENDER

You get the hell off my wife!

He smacks Le Chasseur on the back and the big man rolls off the bed into a corner. The waitress stands.

WAITRESS

Leave him alone!

The bartender backhands her and she falls to the floor.

BARTENDER

You sonofabitch, I should kill you. Both of you!

Le Chasseur turns over and sits against the wall, smiling.

The bartender is taken aback. He glances at his wife who for a moment breaks character and flashes her husband a confused look, then resumes her role and sobs.

LE CHASSEUR

Well, now, I haven't seen this one
in awhile.

He stands, clips his belt, just out of the bartender's range.

LE CHASSEUR (CONT'D)

How much?

The bartender eyes Le Chasseur, figuring his next move.
After a moment, he decides.

BARTENDER

A hundred francs.

LE CHASSEUR

Or what?

BARTENDER

Or I bash your skull in. How 'bout that?

LE CHASSEUR

All right.

Le Chasseur looks at the wife.

LE CHASSEUR (CONT'D)

Any chance we can finish?

WAITRESS

(dropping the act)
You go to hell!

BARTENDER

(chuckles)
You're a nervy bastard, aren't you.

Le Chasseur takes out his wallet.

LE CHASSEUR

Well, I'm all warmed up. And a
hundred francs is... a hundred francs.

He grins, offers the money. The bartender motions toward
the bed and Le Chasseur drops it on the quilt.

The waitress reaches for the notes and Le Chasseur swiftly
kicks her in the face - she cries out and falls to the floor,
blood spewing from her nose.

Before the shocked bartender can react Le Chasseur springs
toward him, catches the sweeping cudgel with one hand, draws
the couteau with the other and buries the knife deep into
the bartender's gut.

The bartender drops to his knees with his mouth agape. Le Chasseur removes the cudgel from the man's hand and lets him go. The bartender groans and falls to the floor.

Le Chasseur comes and stands over the waitress. She looks up at him, terrified.

Le Chasseur smiles wickedly. Then his eyes fill with hate and he raises the cudgel and brings it down...

BAM! A train ticket is STAMPED.

A dreary, middle-aged clerk hands it to Michelle. Michelle walks toward through the MEAUX TRAIN STATION.

Passes a small stand with a sign that reads:

TELEGRAMS 15 WORDS/50 CENTIMES

She steps up to the counter and writes a message.

The telegram reads: *"House destroyed. I am unhurt. Gone to Aunt Rosa in Lisbon. Love, M."*

She passes the paper and some coins to a TELEGRAPH CLERK, a fat, balding man in his fifties.

TELEGRAPH CLERK

This is on the front. That's extra.

MICHELLE

(dismayed)

How much?

TELEGRAPH CLERK

A full franc.

Michelle is stunned - it's highway robbery.

MICHELLE

Please, Monsieur, I haven't much money and I simply must get word to my husband. Our home was destroyed and I -

TELEGRAPH CLERK

Madame, please, save your breath. I can assure you I've heard it all before.

He pushes the message and money back to Michelle. She stares at it, at the clerk. It's an unsettling look devoid of all emotion that she holds for a long still moment. The telegraph clerk caves. Takes the coins and message.

TELEGRAPH CLERK (CONT'D)

We should all go through life as a pretty girl.

MICHELLE

Oh, Monsieur, thank you. Thank you so much!

TELEGRAPH CLERK

Go on, get out of here before I change my mind. Go get the train conductor to upgrade your seat. Go on now, shoo! You'll miss your train.

Michelle moves off toward the waiting locomotive.

EXT. SALAMANCA, SPAIN - DAY

Another train, the freight that carries Alain and Emile, rolls past a sign that reads:

SALAMANCA

It steams into a FREIGHT YARD. Stops. The boxcar door is thrown open and Alain hops down, favoring his wounded leg.

He turns to help Emile. In the b.g. two engineers step away from the train engine. Alain plants himself against the side of the car and waves Emile back inside.

The engineers pass from sight beyond another train. Alain waves Emile out, helps him down and they scurry away.

EXT. SALAMANCA - DAY

Alain and Emile walk along a quiet cobblestone street, their footsteps echoing off the terra cotta apartments with their red-tiled roofs.

A Spanish policeman turns onto the street ahead of them.

Alain takes Emile by the arm, hurries down a side street.

Climb steps between two buildings. After a few meters Emile collapses, exhausted by the effort. Alain picks him up and carries him into an alley beside a men's clothing store.

INT. STORE - DAY

A back door is kicked open and Alain enters with Emile. He weaves between racks of coats into a back office where he lays the boy on an ottoman. Shakes off a dust-cover and drapes it over the shivering Emile.

At a sink he fills a cup with water and makes a wet compress from a shirt. Brings the cup to Emile and helps him drink. Wipes his brow with the compress.

EMILE

Where are we?

ALAIN

Salamanca.

EMILE

How far is that from Lisbon?

ALAIN

Not far, another half day by train.
Here, drink it all.

Emile drinks. Coughs, a painful rumble deep in his chest.

EMILE

Half a day. Might as well be a year.
What's your name?

ALAIN

Alain.

EMILE

I know that. Your full name?

ALAIN

Alain LaFrancouer.

Emile smiles, speaks weakly.

EMILE

The French heart. How 'bout that.
It suits you. Don't forget, Alain
LaFrancouer, I am Emile Dufay of
Liege, remember that after I'm gone.

ALAIN

What sort of talk is that? You're
going to be fine. I've just got to
get you some medicine.

Alain wipes Emile's brow.

EMILE

Medicine... You're a hopeless liar.
But that can't be helped. Promise
me something, and don't break your
word.

Off Alain's look.

EMILE (CONT'D)

I want you to pray for me when I'm dead so I don't spend too long in purgatory.

ALAIN

You're not going to purgatory or anywhere else. You're just feverish. Now lay back and rest. What you need is a doctor.

He clutches Alain's sleeve, lifts his head.

EMILE

I don't want a doctor! I want you to pray for me!

Emile is flush with fever, on the edge of delirium, but there's something compelling and lucid about the quaver in his voice, the glint of terror in his eyes.

ALAIN

All right... Easy now.

Emile lies back.

EMILE

I'm an orphan, you know, all alone. I've no one, just you. And when you're dead you can't pray for yourself. I'll have no way to atone for my sins. I'll be forgotten, left in purgatory till judgment day. Say you'll do it. Swear it.

ALAIN

Emile, I don't really believe in -

EMILE

It doesn't matter what you believe. Just be sincere. Say a rosary, or just a prayer. Is that so much to ask. After all, I saved your life.

Alain looks down upon this very sick little boy. Chokes up, moved with empathy for Emile. He takes his hand, pats it.

ALAIN

All right, Emile. If it comes to that, I'll do it. You have my word. Now you just lay still...
(affectionately)
and stop jabbering, I can't hear myself think.

Emile sighs, as if a huge weight has been lifted off of him. He looks wearily at Alain then closes his eyes.

EXT. STREET - SALAMANCA - DAY

Alain hobbles down a cobblestone street with an unconscious Emile cradled in his arms. It's a laborious effort on his bad leg and Alain grimaces with every step.

He comes upon an OLD WOMAN sweeping the front of a pension.

ALAIN

Senora. Doctor! We need a doctor?

The woman stops sweeping and walks into the street, pointing.

OLD WOMAN

Doctor Carzola lives there. There!
Just around the corner. The large
white house on the left.

Alain heads in that direction.

AROUND THE CORNER

Alain finds a white house with a sign on the door:

DR. ENRIQUE CARZOLA

EXT. DOCTOR CARZOLA'S HOME - DAY

Alain bangs on the door. DOCTOR CARZOLA answers, a large gruff man in his sixties. He looks hard at the ragtag man on his doorstep carrying the boy.

DOCTOR CARZOLA

What's wrong with him?

ALAIN

He's very ill. Pneumonia.

Doctor Carzola assesses Alain, takes a step back and swings open the door. Alain enters, favoring his wounded leg.

FOLLOWING

Doctor Carzola into a converted parlor, an examination room off the foyer.

DOCTOR CARZOLA

Over there.

Alain lays Emile on a table. Doctor Carzola examines him, checks the boy's pulse, his breathing, etc.

DOCTOR CARZOLA (CONT'D)
Is this your son?

ALAIN
No.

Doctor Carzola stops and looks at Alain.

ALAIN (CONT'D)
I met him on a train.

Doctor Carzola straightens.

ALAIN (CONT'D)
I'm a deserter, French army. I'm on
my way to Portugal.

Doctor Carzola stares squarely at Alain. Takes the admission rather matter-of-factly then resumes his examination.

DOCTOR CARZOLA
I see. How long has he been
unconscious?

ALAIN
A few minutes.

Doctor Carzola goes to a glass cabinet and removes a cannula and bladder. He intubates Emile.

DOCTOR CARZOLA
Come here.

Alain comes to his side.

DOCTOR CARZOLA (CONT'D)
Wait with the boy. Keep him
breathing. I have to get medicine
from the chemist.

ALAIN
Can you save him?

DOCTOR CARZOLA
Just keep pressing this. Here, like
this.

He demonstrates for Alain. Alain tries, gets it right.

Doctor Carzola goes to the door where he throws on a coat and casts a parting glance at Alain.

Alain pumps the bladder. Looks at a clock. It reads: 7:40.

At 7:55 --

Alain pumps the bladder rhythmically, then suddenly with great vigor. After a few moments he stops and removes the cannula. Emile is dead.

Alain's eyes brim with tears. He wipes away a bit of bloody spittle from the boy's mouth, strokes Emile's hair. Turns, and through a break in a curtain, sees -

The doctor hurrying home with two policemen in tow.

ALAIN

Sonofabitch.

Alain rushes out of the room, limping.

Comes out a back door and into an ALLEY where one of the policemen rounds a corner.

The cop shouts. BLOWS A WHISTLE.

Alain takes off the other way, moving as fast as he can on his bum leg. He turns down a STREET.

Hops over a fence. Lands. Falls. Clutching his leg in pain. His pants stained with blood.

Another policeman appears down an alley behind him, BLOWING HIS WHISTLE. Alain scrambles to his feet and hobbles off.

Rounds a corner onto a narrow street.

Crosses a BRIDGE into a WOODED AREA beside the town. WHISTLES and SHOUTING approaching behind him.

IN THE WOODS

Alain pauses on a narrow dirt road and thinks what to do. Hides in the nearby brush.

A policeman comes huffing and puffing up the road past him. Alain keeping low, listening.

Another policeman passes by and meets up with the first cop who has stopped a monk driving a wagon loaded with firewood.

ALAIN

Peers through the leaves, sees...

The policemen speaking with the monk out of earshot.

FATHER LUIS, a spare, urbane cleric in his forties, shakes his head "no" and shrugs. The policemen move on.

Father Luis lashes his horse. Comes down the road when Alain comes out of the brush and climbs onto the wagon seat. Grabs an ax off a large pile of wood behind them.

ALAIN (CONT'D)

One word and I put this ax in your back. Understand?

Father Luis nods "yes".

Alain tucks under a tarp laid over the wood and hides.

The wagon rolls over the bridge, past more policemen who rush by oblivious to the monk.

EXT. MONASTERY - DAY

Father Luis stops the wagon before a monastery. Alain comes out from under the tarp holding the ax.

FATHER LUIS

This is as far as I go.

ALAIN

Where are we?

FATHER LUIS

My home.

Alain looks around.

A brass sign beside a door reads: "SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS MONASTERY".

Father Luis gestures toward the ground.

FATHER LUIS (CONT'D)

May I?

Alain and he come off the wagon.

FATHER LUIS (CONT'D)

I can provide you with a little food if you like. To take with you.

ALAIN

Do you have an automobile? A motorbike?

FATHER

And if we did? What would you do, steal it?

Alain tosses the ax back in the wagon.

FATHER (CONT'D)

(re: the horse)

We have the nag. We need her, but if you must then take her. And there's an old bicycle out back, you're welcome to that too.

ALAIN

Thanks. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to frighten you.

Alain turns to go and his leg gives out and he falls. Father Luis looks at the pant leg soaked with blood.

FATHER LUIS

You're hurt. Let me look at that.

He kneels beside Alain. Carefully lifts the pants and examines the leg. Alain's wound is now purulent with spidery red streaks extending up the leg under the skin.

On Alain, sweating.

ALAIN

Where's the bike?

FATHER LUIS

How far do you think you'll get on this leg?

ALAIN

(struggles to his feet)

Far enough. Come on, where is it?

Father Luis stands and points down an alley beside the church.

Alain hobbles off, gets a few feet then falls and passes out.

Father Luis hurries into the monastery. Returns with a short BALD MONK who helps him carry Alain inside.

INT. MICHELLE'S TRAIN - DAY

Travel-weary men, women and children sit three to a row in a second class compartment. Michelle is by a window, staring out at a sleepy Spanish town with a bull-fighting ring.

An attractive young woman guiding a blind young soldier in uniform enters the car and walks down the aisle past Michelle. She watches them pass, wistfully, and we can only imagine that she's thinking of Alain.

A man across from her opens his newspaper to page two. Michelle scans the front page headlines:

"German Offensive Repulsed!", "Army Desertions On The Decline", "Bolsheviks Stir Unrest In Russia".

And a small strip article with a photo of the three peasant children -- "*Pilgrims Gather in Fatima*".

Michelle stares at the three innocent faces, wondering.

EXT. CONDUCTOR'S OFFICE - SALAMANCA FREIGHT YARD - DAY

Le Chasseur steps out of the freight yard office and walks past his car and across tracks searching the parked trains.

He finds the numbered caboose boarded by Alain. Slides open the door and climbs in.

INT. BOXCAR - ALAIN'S TRAIN - DAY

Le Chasseur finds the brandy flask and rusty can used as a stove. Alain's bandage. Footprints on the dusty floorboards.

EXT. SALAMANCA FREIGHT YARD - DAY

Le Chasseur hops out of the car and examines the ground. More footprints - Alain's and the boy's. Le Chasseur thinks.

INT. GENERAL PAPIN'S APARTMENT - DAY

General Papin shaves before a bathroom mirror. A candlestick telephone RINGS in the adjoining bedroom. He wipes his face. Goes to answer it, passing a lovely brunette asleep in bed.

CUT BETWEEN General Papin and Le Chasseur who speaks from a phone in an AUTO REPAIR SHOP where in b.g. two repairmen place a new windshield on his maroon Tourer.

GENERAL PAPIN

Hello... I was wondering when I'd hear from you. Have you found him?

LE CHASSEUR

No. Not yet, but I'm close. I need more money.
(looks at his car)
I've run into some unexpected expenses.

GENERAL PAPIN

How much?

LE CHASSEUR

Two hundred francs.

GENERAL PAPIN

Where are you?

LE CHASSEUR

Salamanca.

GENERAL PAPIN

Spain?...

The brunette turns over in bed.

GENERAL PAPIN (CONT'D)

All right, I'll wire it to the train station. Hold on, I may have something for you.

General Papin sets the phone down and goes to a briefcase set on a chair. He goes through it. Comes up with a telegram and returns to the phone.

GENERAL PAPIN (CONT'D)

We've received a telegram from his wife. She's on her way to Lisbon.

LE CHASSEUR

Lisbon? Do you have an address?

GENERAL PAPIN

Yes, I have it right here. I found it among his next of kin in his service records.

Le Chasseur writes it down.

GENERAL PAPIN (CONT'D)

You say you're close. How close? Do you know where he is?

LE CHASSEUR

Just send the money.

GENERAL PAPIN

I think I have a right...

CLICK - the phone goes dead. General Papin sets it down. The brunette moans, gathers the covers. The general passes the bed and yanks the covers down.

GENERAL PAPIN (CONT'D)

Get up. And get out! It's after noon.

He storms back to the bathroom.

INT. BEDROOM - MONASTERY - DAY

The short bald monk carries a bowl of water into a sparsely furnished room where Alain lays in bed with fever. Father Luis sits beside him cooling him down with a wet towel.

FATHER LUIS
 (exchanging bowls)
 Thank you, brother.

BALD MONK
 His color's better.

FATHER LUIS
 I think the worst is past... Better
 set aside some soup for him. He'll
 be hungry when he wakes.

BALD MONK
 I already have.

Knowing smiles between the monks. The bald monk leaves.
 Father Luis wets Alain's dry lips with a cloth.

ALAIN
 (weakly)
 Michelle...

EXT. LISBON TRAIN STATION - DAY

Michelle disembarks a train into a crowded station. A HAWKER
 selling crucifixes and Mother Mary figurines sees her and
 pounces, tugging at her sleeve.

HAWKER
 Going to Fatima? I've crucifixes
 blessed by the bishop himself...

Michelle brushes past him. He quickly turns to another woman.

HAWKER (CONT'D)
 Crucifixes, Senora, and genuine relics
 from Fatima: The very leaves of the
 holm oak. Only one escudo... Fifty
 centavos... Name your price!

A few steps away a man passes out handbills. He thrusts one
 at Michelle and she takes it, reads:

"Fatima hoax! Peasants gulled by group hypnosis!"

Michelle lets it fall from her hands. It lands among others
 dropped on the train station floor.

EXT. LISBON TRAIN STATION - DAY

Michelle emerges onto a bustling city street. It takes her
 breath away - rush hour traffic, packed sidewalks, large
 buildings. She looks around, lost, a lamb in the wilderness.

EXT. STREET - LISBON - DAY

Michelle steps off a bus, the low afternoon sun in her eyes.

Walks a narrow street checking apartment building numbers. Comes to an old brick building beside the "DECOSTA RESTAURANTE". She recognizes it.

NOTE: This is the building in the photo with her aunt.

EXT. FOYER - AUNT ROSA'S BUILDING - DAY

Michelle checks the names on the building directory. Traces a finger over them, stopping on "R. COSTA #206".

INT. HALLWAY - AUNT ROSA'S BUILDING - DAY

Michelle climbs stairs. Pads down a dingy hallway past an old man in a tattered coat smiling toothlessly.

She finds her aunt's apartment. Knocks on the door. A heavysset woman in her fifties answers - MRS. SILVA.

MRS. SILVA

Yes?

MICHELLE

Excuse me, but I'm looking for Rosabel Costa.

MRS. SILVA

And who are you?

MICHELLE

Michelle LaFrancouer. Madame Costa is my aunt.

Mrs. Silva's eyes widen, she beams.

MRS. SILVA

Ah! Michelle. Yes, of course, thank God you've come. Did you get my letter?

MICHELLE

No. What letter?

MRS. SILVA

I sent you a letter. About your aunt. Oh, dear. Oh, dear... Come. Come in.

She opens the door and Michelle enters

AUNT ROSA'S APARTMENT

Mrs. Silva shuts the door and turns to Michelle.

MRS. SILVA (CONT'D)
I'm Maria Silva, a good friend of
your aunt's. I live down the hall.
Come, she's just in here...

She ushers Michelle into a bedroom where ROSABEL COSTA lies in bed, a brittle elderly woman the color of old paper. Her eyes are closed and Michelle can't be certain she isn't already dead. Michelle gasps.

MRS. SILVA (CONT'D)
Don't be alarmed, child, she only
sleeps. She's in much better trim
when she's awake.

Mrs. Silva goes and props up a pillow, wipes dribble away from the old woman's mouth.

MRS. SILVA (CONT'D)
She was fine until a week ago. Then
one morning she didn't show up for our
walk. We walk together she and I,
every day but Sunday. I came by to
check and found her like this. That's
when I wrote asking you to come.

Michelle turns and contemplates a response, decides against it, and steps up to the bed.

MICHELLE
Is she eating?

MRS. SILVA
Soup. A little wet bread. I do
what I can but --

MICHELLE
Has a doctor seen her?

MRS. SILVA
No, dear. There's no money for
doctors. I change her, feed her,
and wait. Thank God you're here, I
didn't know if I'd last another day.
It's terribly draining.

Michelle turns to Mrs. Silva. Speaks with great sincerity.

MICHELLE
Yes, of course.
(MORE)

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

And thank you for everything you've done for her. You're very kind.

Mrs. Silva smiles and tears up.

MRS. SILVA

She's such a lovely woman. Always laughing, always with the jokes.

She bursts into tears. Michelle consoles her with a hug.

INT. BEDROOM - MONASTERY - NIGHT

Father Luis puts a bowl of soup down in front of Alain.

FATHER LUIS

Careful, it's hot.

Alain eats.

FATHER LUIS (CONT'D)

Not too salty, is it?

ALAIN

No. It's fine. Thank you.

Father Luis sits with him while he eats. After a moment...

FATHER LUIS

You're a long way from the front, my son.

Alain responds with a cautious stare.

FATHER LUIS (CONT'D)

The police are looking for you all over town. It's only a matter of time before they show up here.

ALAIN

I'll move on tomorrow.

FATHER LUIS

Where will you go?

ALAIN

Lisbon.

FATHER LUIS

Don't tell me you've left the front to chase down the Holy Virgin.

ALAIN

What?

FATHER LUIS

The visions of the children, at
Fatima, or haven't you heard?

ALAIN

I heard something about it, from a
friend.

FATHER LUIS

It's really quite remarkable, three
peasant children are claiming to see
our Blessed Mother. People are
flocking from all over to get a look.

ALAIN

Sounds like wishful thinking.

FATHER LUIS

Yes, perhaps it is, but one never
knows. There have been other visits:
Lourdes, Avila. Why not now when we
need her most?

ALAIN

I think my wife is in Lisbon.

FATHER LUIS

Oh?... Michelle?
(off Alain's look)
You kept calling to her in your fever.
And when you find her, then what?
Portugal is an Allied government, no
haven for a deserter.

Alain drops his spoon in the bowl with a clatter. Sits back.
Takes a drink of water amid awkward silence.

Father Luis stands and goes to the door.

FATHER LUIS (CONT'D)

I'll look in on your bandage in the
morning. Good night, my son.

Alain nods tersely and the priest leaves.

INT. AUNT ROSA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Michelle sits bedside with her aunt. She checks her pulse,
concerned. Glances at a wall clock.

Which reads: 10:05.

Michelle gets up, puts on one of her aunt's coats and leaves.

IN THE HALLWAY

She knocks on a neighboring door. Mrs. Silva answers in bedtime dishabille.

MICHELLE

I'm sorry to disturb you, but would you mind looking in on her for a while? I'm going for a doctor.

MRS.SILVA

At this time of night?

MICHELLE

Yes, she's become much weaker. I'm very concerned. Is there a doctor near here?

MRS. SILVA

There's one around the corner on Facenda street.

MICHELLE

Thank you.

Michelle hurries off.

EXT. AUNT ROSA'S BUILDING - NIGHT

Michelle steps onto the street, walks past a maroon Tourer.

EXT. STREET - LISBON - NIGHT

Michelle's footsteps echo off the buildings. Up ahead, two men approach on the sidewalk. She crosses the street.

Turns a corner onto a lane with a row of apartment buildings.

Turns back and bumps into a man in the shadows at the edge of a streetlight. The man shifts into the light - it's Le Chasseur.

A startled Michelle steps back.

LE CHASSEUR

Pardon me, Senora. I didn't mean to frighten you.

Michelle looks around, confused, then appears to want to ask something, but hesitates.

LE CHASSEUR (CONT'D)

Is something wrong?

MICHELLE

No. Well, yes... I'm looking for a doctor, for my aunt. I was told there was one around here.

Le Chasseur smiles and points across the street to a doctor's office. The apartment above has a light on. Michelle rolls her eyes, a blend of embarrassment and relief.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Thank you, Monsieur.

She turns to go.

LE CHASSEUR

You're French. So am I.

He smiles. But Michelle is in too much of a rush to care.

MICHELLE

Yes, I see... Thank you, again.
Good night.

Michelle crosses the street.

LE CHASSEUR

Not at all, Madame. Not at all.

Le Chasseur looks after her, his smile morphing into a menacing stare.

INT. AUNT ROSA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

An old PORTUGUESE DOCTOR listens to Aunt Rosa's heart with a stethoscope. Michelle waiting behind him, watching anxiously. He stands and leads Michelle into a

MAIN ROOM

Where he loads his instruments into a black bag.

PORTUGUESE DOCTOR

My dear, you shouldn't have troubled yourself, or me. That woman needs a priest, not a doctor.

MICHELLE

Is there nothing you can do?

PORTUGUESE DOCTOR

I can stop by the church and wake Father Cabral. I see no reason why he should sleep when I can't.

MICHELLE

I'm sorry, I --

PORTUGUESE DOCTOR

Oh, don't mind me, Senora. I'm just a cranky old man. I'm up half the night anyway. One's reward for a long hard life.

He slips on his coat.

MICHELLE

How long does she have?

PORTUGUESE DOCTOR

God only knows, but not long. Her body's putting up a fight, but the angels are circling.

MICHELLE

I see. Thank you.

Michelle takes a note from her pocket.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

I hope it's no trouble, but I only have francs.

The doctor looks at it, entertains turning it down, then plucks it from her hand.

PORTUGUESE DOCTOR

That will do.

He smiles and leaves. Michelle goes and sinks into a chair. Mrs. Silva brings her a cup of tea and biscuits.

INT. AUNT ROSA'S MAIN ROOM - LATER - CLOSE ON

An empty cup and the remnants of the biscuits.

Viewed through the bedroom doorway, a nondescript priest, FATHER CABRAL, administers the "Sacrament of the Sick" to Aunt Rosa.

Michelle is bedside praying, her cheeks wet with tears. Father blesses himself. Checks Aunt Rosa's breath and lifts the sheet over her head.

INT. ALAIN'S ROOM - MONASTERY - DAY

Alain lies in bed staring at the ceiling, what remains of a half-eaten breakfast beside him on the nightstand. There's a knock at the door and a moment later the bald monk enters. He collects the breakfast tray.

BALD MONK

Senor, Father Luis would like to see you.

Alain gets up and follows him out, favoring his injured leg.

INT. MONASTERY - DAY

The bald monk leads Alain down a corridor. Stops before the entrance to a beautiful vaulted hall - stained glass windows, imposing statuary, quintessentially Catholic. Father Luis stands in a corner lighting candles before a statue.

Alain approaches and the bald monk leaves.

ALAIN

Good morning, Father. You wanted to see me?

FATHER LUIS

A chief inspector from the police paid me a visit last night, asking if I was harboring a deserter.

ALAIN

What'd you tell him?

FATHER LUIS

I told him the question was inappropriate.

He lights the last candle and looks at Alain.

FATHER LUIS (CONT'D)

He wasn't satisfied.

Alain stares at the priest. After a time...

ALAIN

Thank you. I'll be on my way.

FATHER LUIS

Yes, that's probably best.

Alain turns to go.

FATHER LUIS (CONT'D)

Senor. Wait a moment.

Alain stops and the priest looks squarely at him as if he has something to say. He appears to check it and turns instead toward the statue.

FATHER LUIS (CONT'D)

Do you know who this is?

Alain looks at the gray stone statue of a man in a robe holding a book.

ALAIN

Some saint.

FATHER LUIS

Yes, one of the most famous, a father of the modern church - Saint Thomas Aquinas. He was a great scholar, perhaps the greatest in church history. Yet each day, as I light the candles for him, I can't help but think of him as something of a fool.

Alain bites. Looks more closely at the statue, then back at Father Luis.

FATHER LUIS (CONT'D)

Thomas Aquinas took great pains to prove the existence of God, a fruitless exercise. People are forever looking to prove or disprove God's existence. If a flower blooms, God exists. If a child dies, he does not.

ALAIN

And this has something to do with me?

FATHER LUIS

Doesn't it? I know unconscionable men, my son, there is something hollow about them, an emptiness in their eyes. They are dead souls wandering the earth. That is not you.

ALAIN

Whatever faith I had, Father, I lost long ago.

FATHER LUIS

Many men who experience war lose their faith. And yet, others, among all that carnage, manage to find it.

Father Luis pulls out a key. Hands it to Alain.

FATHER LUIS (CONT'D)

I hope you do.

He looks to a side door, pats Alain on the shoulder then walks away. Alain watches him disappear into the dark recesses of the church.

EXT. MONASTERY - DAY

Alain comes out a side door of the monastery. Finds a parked 1910 Bugatti motorcycle beside the building. He starts it up and whips it around. Pausing for a moment to look at a garden statue of Christ with outstretched hands.

Something between understanding and mild amusement flickers in Alain's eyes. He opens the throttle. ROARS away.

EXT. CHURCH GRAVEYARD - DAY

Michelle and Mrs. Silva stand over Aunt Rosa's open grave while Father Cabral reads from the Bible. The gravedigger waiting under a nearby tree.

Not far from him, a man seated on a bench reads a newspaper - Le Chasseur, keeping an eye on Michelle.

EXT. ROAD - DAY - SERIES OF SHOTS - ALAIN RIDING

Beyond the OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY.

Into the hills along a densely FORESTED ROAD.

LATE IN THE DAY

With the sun low in the sky, Alain rounds a bend on a MOUNTAIN ROAD and comes to a stop.

Up ahead a truck is stopped at a border crossing where two guardias man a shack with a road-barrier. Alain looks around for an alternative route - there is none.

BORDER CROSSING

The guards raise the barrier, let the truck driver through.

ALAIN

idles the bike and thinks. He comes to a decision. Puts the bike in gear and cruises up to a guard who motions for him to stop.

Alain smiles, slows the bike, then suddenly kicks the guard aside and cranks the throttle.

He speeds around the barrier and up the road - zigzagging as SHOT RING OUT behind him.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - PORTUGAL - DAY

Alain flies down a road at full speed. At a...

FORK IN THE ROAD

He stops and reads signs listing destinations and distance.
He runs through the names.

Focuses on: "*Lisbon 350 KM*".

He turns in that direction and speeds off into the light of
the afternoon sun.

INT. AUNT ROSA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Michelle comes in with Mrs. Silva and divests herself of a
coat and black veil. The clock on the wall reads: 6:15.

She makes tea at the stove. Sits with Mrs. Silva at the
kitchen table.

MRS. SILVA

What will you do now? Go home to
your family?

MICHELLE

I have no family other than my
husband, and he's at the front.
Aunt Rosa was the only one left.

MRS. SILVA

Damn this war. All this over an
Archduke.

She finishes her tea. Stands to go.

MRS. SILVA (CONT'D)

The world may fall apart around us,
my dear, but I can't neglect my
ironing.

She smiles, touches Michelle's cheek.

MRS. SILVA (CONT'D)

You're young and lovely, Michelle.
I'm sure life has many wonderful things
in store for you. Remember that.

Michelle smiles faintly.

Mrs. Silva puts on her coat, noticing a calendar beside the
coat rack. She turns abruptly and looks around the apartment,
struck by a thought.

She goes to a desk, looks through the drawers and comes up
with a train ticket.

MRS. SILVA (CONT'D)

Here it is... Wonderful things indeed.
(turns to Michelle)
What do you think of serendipity?

She comes and lays the ticket before Michelle.

MICHELLE

I'm afraid I don't understand. What is it?

MRS. SILVA

A ticket, to Fatima. Your aunt was determined to be there for the last visitation on the thirteenth. She had me buy it for her.

Michelle looks at the calendar date: *October 12th*.

MICHELLE

Thank you, but I'm not interested.

MRS. SILVA

Oh, no dear, you don't know what you're saying. It's really quite extraordinary, there's been nothing like it since Lourdes. Haven't you read the accounts in the papers?

Michelle stands, hands her back the ticket.

MICHELLE

Please. You've been very kind, but I would just like to get some rest.

Mrs. Silva appears to want to object. She thinks better of it and places the ticket on the table.

MRS.SILVA

Well, then at least turn it in and get her money back. God knows you can use it.

Michelle walks her to the door and let's her out. Goes back to the table and sits.

EXT. ROAD - PORTUGAL - NIGHT

Alain rides along a winding forest road.

INT. AUNT ROSA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Michelle sits on the bed in one of Aunt Rosa's nightgowns, her hands clasped together in prayer. She blesses herself then gets into bed.

EXT. LISBON - DAY

Sunrise over Lisbon.

EXT. STREET - LISBON - DAY

A store owner raises the awning over his fruit stand. Turns to the drone of a motorcycle coming down the street.

Alain dopplers by.

AROUND A CORNER

Alain passes a milkman and brakes and turns around.

He shows the milkman the picture of Michelle before her aunt's apartment building. The man points, gives directions.

INT. AUNT ROSA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Michelle has her morning coffee at the kitchen table. She fingers the train ticket.

Notes the departure time: 8:00 AM.

Checks the clock - 7:10.

EXT. LISBON STREET - DAY

Alain turns at an intersection, narrowly missing a car.

INT. AUNT ROSA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Michelle writes a note. Puts on her coat and leaves.

On the table, the ticket is gone.

INT. HALLWAY - AUNT ROSA'S BUILDING - DAY

Michelle walks down to Mrs. Silva's apartment and slips the note under her door. Leaves.

EXT. AUNT ROSA'S BUILDING - DAY

Michelle exits the building. Walks up the street out of frame. Linger, we zero in on the building across the street, on a second story window - Le Chasseur watching.

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

Michelle boards a bus. Takes a seat. Just as the door closes Le Chasseur runs up and boards.

INT. BUS - SAME

He comes down the aisle. Looks at Michelle and smiles.

Michelle looks away. Stiffens in her seat as he stops and considers the empty window seat beside her. He moves on and Michelle breathes a sigh of relief.

EXT. AUNT ROSA'S BUILDING - DAY

Alain turns the motorcycle onto the small lane before Aunt Rosa's apartment building. Stops and checks the picture, confirming the location.

He runs a finger down the building registry to the name: "R. COSTA - #206". Hurries inside.

INT. HALLWAY - AUNT ROSA'S BUILDING - DAY

Alain knocks on the apartment door. No one answers. Mrs. Silva steps out of her apartment carrying her purse.

MRS. SILVA

May I help you?

ALAIN

Do you know who lives here?

MRS. SILVA

Do you?

ALAIN

I'm sorry. I'm looking for my wife. I believe this is her aunt's apartment.

MRS. SILVA

Michelle?

ALAIN

Yes. Yes! You know Michelle? Have you seen her?

MRS. SILVA

I saw her last night. But you won't find her in there. She's gone to Fatima.

ALAIN

Fatima?

MRS. SILVA

Yes, hold on. I have it right here.

She digs into her purse and comes up with Michelle's note and hands it to Alain.

MRS. SILVA (CONT'D)

It was under my door this morning.

Alain reads.

MRS. SILVA (CONT'D)

She's taking the eight o'clock train to Aljustrel. If you hurry you might catch her.

ALAIN

(gives back the note)

Thank you!

Alain hurries off, favoring his injured leg.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

The bus pulls up to the train station. Michelle steps off and goes inside, followed at a distance by Le Chasseur.

INT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

She walks down the platform in search of her train, past a free-standing clock that reads: 7:50. Le Chasseur shadows her through the crowd a few meters behind.

ALAIN

Races through the CITY STREETS.

MICHELLE

Walks to her train, stops and turns into a public restroom. When she turns, Le Chasseur quickly ducks out of sight.

ALAIN

Passes a road sign with a train station emblem.

MICHELLE

Exits the restroom. Takes her place behind TWO OLD WOMEN in a queue boarding the train. Old Woman #1 turns to her.

OLD WOMAN #1

Are you traveling to Fatima too?

MICHELLE

Yes, I am.

OLD WOMAN #1

It's very exciting. Don't you think?
I have no idea what to expect.

OLD WOMAN #2

Expect a crowd.

(off Michelle's look)

Last month they had nearly thirty-thousand people. They say there will be double that today.

MICHELLE

Tell me, do you suppose we'll actually see the Blessed Mother?

OLD WOMAN #2

Oh, no dear. Only the children can see her, and just two of them are able to hear her.

OLD WOMAN #1

She speaks to the oldest child, Jacinta.

OLD WOMAN #2

Lucia. Jacinta is the younger girl.

OLD WOMAN #1

Don't correct me. You're always correcting me in front of people.

Old Woman #2 looks at Michelle with an exasperated expression.

Michelle smiles. Gets a thoughtful look, truly intrigued by the mystery of the events at Fatima.

The queue moves and they board. As they do Alain comes into view at the far end of the platform searching for Michelle.

He shoulders his way through the crowd. Suddenly stops...

Ahead of him Michelle boards the train.

ALAIN

Michelle! Michelle!

At the moment of his call a LOCOMOTIVE'S ENGINE POWERS UP and Alain's voice is drowned out by the noise.

Michelle boards. Alain pushes through the crowd after her, colliding with another man.

ALAIN (CONT'D)

Excuse me.

Alain tries to hurry past when the man takes hold of his arm and puts a gun against his ribs.

LE CHASSEUR

Slow down, Captain. You're not going anywhere.

Alain looks at Le Chasseur, then to the train. Michelle is gone, on board.

LE CHASSEUR (CONT'D)

I haven't the slightest compunction against putting a hole through you, right here.

Alain reads his eyes - Le Chasseur is a stone killer.

Le Chasseur leads him away, past the train pulling out of the station.

INT. PASSENGER CAR - TRAIN TO FATIMA - DAY

Michelle stares out the train window at the faces of the crowd. Does a double-take as she spots -

Alain held by Le Chasseur, a gun against his ribs.

Michelle is stunned. Breathless. She bolts up and races out of the car.

INT. TRAIN STATION - DOWN THE PLATFORM - SAME

Michelle comes out onto a landing between the cars. She looks to jump off, but the train has picked up speed. Michelle looks back and sees...

Alain and Le Chasseur exit the station.

She jumps. Falls hard to her knees, then rises and runs after Alain.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Le Chasseur forces Alain into his car.

LE CHASSEUR

Put your head between your knees.

Alain complies and Le Chasseur clubs him over the head with the gun knocking him out.

MICHELLE

Exits the station looking for Alain, in b.g., unnoticed by Michelle, Le Chasseur's maroon Tourer pulls out into traffic.

A panic-stricken Michelle runs up and down the street, searching the sidewalk crowd, the parked cars and those rushing by - Alain is no where in sight.

She halts in the middle of the sidewalk and looks around hopelessly, hot tears welling up in her eyes.

INT. LE CHASSEUR'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY

The blurry image of a man clears and comes into focus as Le Chasseur seated by a window with his feet propped up on a table, a shot glass and bottle of Ginja in front of him. In his hand is the photo of Michelle with Aunt Rosa.

Alain, tied to a chair in the center of the room, rolls his head and shakes off the cobwebs, winces.

ALAIN

What'd you hit me with, a cannon?

LE CHASSEUR

After last time, just be glad I didn't cut your throat.

ALAIN

Oh, that's right... Too bad about your car. You know you really ought to look where you're driving.

Le Chasseur looks side-eyed at Alain. Pockets the picture and throws back a shot. Pours another.

ALAIN (CONT'D)

So now what?

LE CHASSEUR

Now we wait for your friend the general to arrive.

ALAIN

And how long's that?

LE CHASSEUR

I don't know yet, I have to call him. A couple days. Depends.

ALAIN

You plan to leave me tied to this chair 'til then?

LE CHASSEUR

That depends too, on how much trouble you are.

Alain thinks, while behind his back he sets to work on the cord tied to his hands. He keeps the conversation going.

ALAIN

So how'd you manage to stay out of the war? You look fit enough. What happened, did they figure out you're a degenerate?

Le Chasseur laughs.

LE CHASSEUR

Degenerate? Big word. Big word for a dumb villager fool enough to throw his life away in the Army.

ALAIN

What can I say, I love my country.

LE CHASSEUR

Ha! You love the uniform and bossing people around.

ALAIN

Only a man who's never been on the front would say that. Tell me, what's a disgraced policeman do with his time when he's not out bounty hunting?

Le Chasseur's jaw tightens and he spits out his words.

LE CHASSEUR

Don't act smug with me, Captain, you're the one tied to the chair.

Alain works the knot, loosens one of the cords. Comes up with something else to say.

ALAIN

So how'd you find me?

LE CHASSEUR

It was simple enough. Ever spend time on a farm?

(off Alain's look)

No? Well I grew up on one, and I'll tell you, you can learn a great deal on a farm, about all sorts of things. Now suppose you want to catch a wild pig. Hmm? What do you do? Run all over the countryside after him? No. You just find yourself a little sow in heat...

(MORE)

LE CHASSEUR (CONT'D)

(he glances across
the street, back at
Alain)

Hang her by her feet from a tree,
and wait. Sooner or later the
lovesick fool comes around. And
then...

He makes a motion with his fingers of shooting a gun.

LE CHASSEUR (CONT'D)

Pow... You've got him.

The implicit reference to Michelle isn't lost on Alain and a great fear flickers in his eyes - he controls it, attempts to mask it with a grin and false insouciance.

ALAIN

Pig farmer, huh?

(sniffs)

So that's what that smell is.

Le Chasseur whips out a handkerchief from his coat and strides over to Alain. Ties it around Alain's mouth.

LE CHASSEUR

Finding you has been more trouble
than it's worth. But you want to
know something?

He spots the loosed cord, calmly reties it, tightly, as he speaks into Alain's ear.

LE CHASSEUR (CONT'D)

I think I've discovered just the
right thing to make it all worth my
while...

(points)

And it's right across the street in
that apartment.

Alain glares at Le Chasseur, who smiles, delighted to have finally riled Alain.

LE CHASSEUR (CONT'D)

She really is something in the flesh,
isn't she?

Le Chasseur pats Alain on the cheek and walks out.

EXT. STREET - TRAIN STATION - DAY

Out of earshot, Michelle rushes up to a beat cop. Speaks frantically, pointing, gesturing.

The cop hurries off with her.

INT. GENERAL PAPIN'S APARTMENT - DAY

General Papin lies in bed. The phone RINGS.

GENERAL PAPIN
(groggy)
Hello...

LE CHASSEUR (O.S.)
I've got him.

General Papin sits up, instantly alert.

GENERAL PAPIN
Where are you?

INT. LISBON CAFE

Le Chasseur speaks into a wall phone at the end of a bar.

LE CHASSEUR
Lisbon. What do you want me to do
with him?

GENERAL PAPIN

Thinks. After a long pause...

GENERAL PAPIN
Kill him.

INT. LISBON CAFE - DAY

Le Chasseur hangs up and walks out.

INT. LE CHASSEUR'S HOTEL ROOM

Alain sits tied to the chair, sweating, moving his ankles back and forth to get some play in Deserter #1's too-large boots that have been tied to the chair. He strains to lift his right foot out - makes a little progress - lowers it to gain some play, then raises the foot again with all his might.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Michelle and the cop search the crowd. The cop stops, looks around the busy street and throws up his hands. He nods apologetically at Michelle and continues on his beat.

EXT. LE CHASSEUR'S HOTEL - DAY

Le Chasseur walks down a sidewalk.

INT. LE CHASSEUR'S HOTEL - SAME

Alain struggles to free his feet. He pulls hard, nearly falls over backwards.

EXT. LE CHASSEUR'S HOTEL - DAY

Le Chasseur enters the lobby.

ALAIN

Works on his right foot. Finally slides it out of the boot and free of the chair. He rests, catches his breath.

LE CHASSEUR CLIMBS THE HOTEL STAIRS.

ALAIN WORKS ON THE OTHER FOOT.

LE CHASSEUR WALKS DOWN THE HALL.

ALAIN PULLS ON THE LEFT FOOT FOR ALL HE'S WORTH.

LE CHASSEUR REACHES HIS ROOM DOOR.

ALAIN HEARS THE KEY IN THE LOCK.

INT. LE CHASSEUR'S HOTEL ROOM

Le Chasseur enters. Alain is where he left him. He comes around in front of Alain as he speaks.

LE CHASSEUR

I just spoke with your friend General
Papin --

He stops in mid-sentence and looks at Alain's face, drenched with sweat. He checks his hands - feet... where just the toes are tucked into the boots.

Before Le Chasseur can react Alain plants his feet and explodes upward with the chair - bashing his head into Le Chasseur's chin.

Le Chasseur staggers back and collapses, stunned to half-consciousness from the blow.

Alain rushes backward and smashes the chair against the wall. Shattering it. He shakes loose the ties, pulls off the gag.

Le Chasseur comes to. Stands and fumbles for his gun.

Alain picks up a chair leg, rushes him, and knocks the gun from his hand.

Le Chasseur draws his couteau and the two circle one another around the room: Alain moving stiffly on his injured leg, lashing out with the club; Le Chasseur swiping with the knife.

HOTEL FRONT DESK

The hotel MANAGER hears THE COMMOTION UPSTAIRS.

RESUME:

Alain and Le Chasseur now battling it out hand to hand - one holding back the knife, the other the club.

Le Chasseur lowers the knife blade, cuts into Alain's wrist. Alain grimaces, then suddenly releases his hold on the knife-hand and decks Le Chasseur.

Le Chasseur pops up sweeping the knife and Alain in two quick strokes - breaks his knife-hand wrist and slams the club into Le Chasseur's temple. A lethal blow that drops the bounty hunter like a sack.

BANGING at the door.

MANAGER (O.S.)

What's going on in there? Open this door! Open up or I'll call the police!

Alain picks up his shoes and slips out the window.

IN THE HALL

A custodian brandishing a wrench joins the manager. He hands him keys and the manager opens the door.

The two men burst into the room. Le Chasseur's body lies on the floor and a window curtain flaps in the breeze.

EXT. LE CHASSEUR'S HOTEL - DAY

Alain hangs from the building fascia, drops into the street.

Across the way Mrs. Silva approaches her building carrying a bag of groceries. She stops and looks at Alain as he drops down. She recognizes him, stunned as much by his climbing out of the building as by his inexplicable presence here.

Alain turns and runs off, limping, around the corner.

EXT. STREET - LISBON - DAY

Alain slows to a walk to avoid attention. Comes upon a bicycle near a store. Hops on it, and rides away.

INT. LE CHASSEUR'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY

A POLICE INSPECTOR stands over the body of Le Chasseur.
Beat cop #2 takes the statements of the manager and custodian.

The inspector kneels and looks through the Le Chasseur's pockets. Comes up with his identification, Alain's service photo, and the photo of Michelle before her aunt's building.

Intrigued, the inspector goes to the window and looks out at the same building across the street.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Alain gets off the bicycle and onto the motorcycle parked outside the station. He starts it up. Speeds away.

EXT. LE CHASSEUR'S HOTEL - DAY

The inspector exits the hotel and crosses the street where BEAT COP #3 questions Mrs. Silva.

BEAT COP #3
Inspector, I think you'll want to
talk with this woman.

A frightened Mrs. Silva looks at the inspector.

INT. BUS - DAY

A devastated Michelle looks out the bus window at the city streets, eyes brimming with tears.

EXT. BUS STOP - AUNT ROSA'S STREET - DAY

Michelle steps off the bus. Walks up the street.

Arrives at her aunt's apartment building - no police are in sight or any sign of the commotion from before.

INT. HALLWAY - AUNT ROSA'S BUILDING - DAY

Michelle crests the stairs to her floor and walks past Mrs. Silva's apartment. Mrs. Silva comes out behind her.

MRS. SILVA
Michelle! What on earth are you
doing here? Oh dear, you won't
believe what's happened. Your husband
was here.

MICHELLE
Alain! You saw him?

MRS. SILVA

Yes, he was here asking for you. I told him you'd gone to the train station, to Fatima. Oh, but I'm afraid something terrible has happened.

MICHELLE

What are you talking about? What's happened?

MRS. SILVA

The police are after him, he's wanted for murder.

MICHELLE

Murder?

MRS. SILVA

You see, I saw him jump out of the building across the street. I know it was him, he looked right at me. They say he killed a man.

MICHELLE

Oh, my God...

Michelle thinks.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Are you sure you told him I was going to Fatima.

(Mrs. Silva nods)

Do you know someone with a motorcar?

Mrs. Silva gets a look like perhaps she does.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

I saw Alain at the train station. A man was holding a gun on him. That's why I got off the train. Now please! I must find him.

EXT. LISBON CHURCH - DAY

Father Cabral hurries out of the church and into a converted taxi where THREE NUNS wait in the car - a PRIORESS in the front seat and two younger nuns in the back.

FATHER CABRAL

Where's Sister Beatrix?

The nun next to him shrugs. Father Cabral looks back at the church and lays on the HORN.

A fat nun, SISTER BEATRIX, comes out carrying an umbrella and a travel bag. She climbs in the back seat with the bag.

FATHER CABRAL (CONT'D)

Not with the bag. Here, give me that.

Father Cabral gets out and reaches across the roof for the bag. Takes it to the boot. As he does Mrs. Silva and Michelle round the corner behind him.

MRS. SILVA

Father Cabral! Wait!

He turns as the two women hurry up to him.

FATHER CABRAL

Mrs. Silva. What is it? We're in a hurry.

MRS. SILVA

Are you going to Fatima?

FATHER CABRAL

Yes.

MRS. SILVA

Oh, my... excuse me... I'm out of breath.

MICHELLE

Father, I asked Mrs. Silva to bring me here. May I come with you? I simply must get to Fatima and you're my only hope.

FATHER CABRAL

I'm sorry, but as you can see we haven't any room.

He puts the nun's bag in the boot and comes around to the driver's door. Michelle takes his sleeve.

MICHELLE

Father, please. You don't understand.

FATHER CABRAL

No, you don't understand. I think this terribly rude. And Mrs. Silva you and I will have a long talk about this when I return. Now if you'll excuse me.

He gets in the car and starts it up.

MICHELLE

Father, please! Listen to me. Just for a moment.

Michelle breaks into tears. The nuns look at Michelle with varying concern, Sister Beatrix appearing the most sympathetic.

FATHER CABRAL

All right, dear. No need for all that.

He turns to the prioress in an appeal for help, but her stolid expression puts it right back on him.

MICHELLE

My husband is there. And he's in danger. Terrible danger... He's come all the way from the front just to find me. Don't you see, I have to go. I just have to...

Father looks at Mrs. Silva who confirms this with a nod.

FATHER CABRAL

Where do you suggest I put you, in the boot?

Sister Beatrix taps his shoulder.

SISTER BEATRIX

She may have my seat, Father.
 (sweetly, to Michelle)
 I hope you find your husband, dear...
 (to Father Cabral)
 I don't mind. Besides I'm much too fat to travel in these little boxes. I'm sure the Blessed Mother will understand.

EXT. ROAD TO FATIMA - DAY

Gray sheets of rain sweep over open countryside where a black ribbon of highway buckles over a rise in the land. Alain comes over the crest on the motorcycle. Weaves around a slow-moving truck and speeds away.

EXT. ROAD TO FATIMA - SAME

Father Cabral's converted black taxi heads into the countryside, the outskirts of Lisbon visible in b.g.

INT. FATHER CABRAL'S CAR

Michelle looks out at gathering rain clouds ahead of them.

EXT. ROAD TO FATIMA - DAY

A police car travels the same road, but farther back, closer to the skyline of Lisbon.

INT. POLICE CAR - DAY

The police inspector sits up front with his driver. The car hits a bump, swerves.

INSPECTOR

Slow down. I don't want to end up
in a ditch.

INT. FATHER CABRAL'S CAR - DAY

A hard rain overloads the wipers. Father Cabral drives with two hands on the wheel, peering out the blurred windshield. In back, Nuns #1 and #2 mumble the rosary. Michelle watches them with concern. The prioress turns around.

PRIORESS

Don't be alarmed, child, their prayers
are in preparation for today's events,
and nothing to do with Father's driving.

Father Cabral shoots her a look.

EXT. ROAD TO FATIMA - DAY - SHOTS OF ALAIN TRAVELING.

He climbs higher into the rocky, pine-clad RANGES OF THE SERRA D'AIRES.

Rides past an OLIVE GROVE...

And a CRUNBLING BUILDING.

FARTHER ON

He swerves around a horse-drawn wagon cresting a muddy grade.

Turns where a sign reads: ALJUSTREL.

EXT. ALJUSTREL - DAY

Cars, wagons and foot traffic pack a narrow town street where everyone heads the same way. Near the far end of the street Alain arrives on the bike.

EXT. LEIRA ROAD - DAY

Alain leaves behind the white-washed stone houses of Aljustrel.

Travels the twisting, rain-soaked road to the Cova da Iria.

At one point he drops his feet to move the bike through a deep section of mud. Suddenly the bike sputters, stalls. Alain checks the fuel gage - empty.

He walks the bike off the road and hides it behind a fence. Joins the column of pilgrims making for the Cova da Iria.

EXT. FATHER CABRAL'S CAR - DAY

Father Cabral drives past the crumbling building, and the sign that reads: ALJUSTREL.

INT. FATHER CABRAL'S CAR - ALJUSTREL - DAY

Father Cabral, the nuns and Michelle look out the windshield at an amazing procession of cars, wagons, carriages and people packed onto the tiny hamlet's main road.

Michelle turns and looks out her window, searching for Alain among the passing crowd.

EXT. LEIRA ROAD - DAY

Father Cabral's car moves slowly through traffic along the twisting road. Past a fence where the back end of Alain's motorcycle is in view.

INT. FATHER CABRAL'S CAR - LEIRA ROAD - FARTHER ON

The car is stopped, bumper to bumper on the muddy track that serves as a road. Michelle peers out the window, glimpses...

A man resembling Alain walking ahead of them among the crowd.

She rolls down her window and cranes to look. Catches Alain in profile just before he vanishes into the crowd.

MICHELLE

Alain! Alain!

(turns to Father Cabral)

That's him! I see him!

She looks at the traffic blocking them in. Hesitates, then throws open the door.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Thank you! Thank you all so much!

And she's off, into the crowd. The AD-LIBBED GOOD WISHES of the clerics called after her.

EXT. LEIRA ROAD - DAY

Michelle hurries through the crowd. Peering over the shoulders of the people for another glimpse of Alain.

She catches sight of him. Hurries on, then slips in the mud. When she rises she finds no sign of him.

Panic-stricken, she rushes up a gradient and cresting it comes upon a breathtaking view of the...

COVA DA IRIA

Where SEVENTY-THOUSAND PEOPLE fill the pasture and surrounding rim. A sea of open umbrellas, like black mushroom caps, ward of a light drizzle, blanketing the entire bowl-shaped landscape.

Michelle stops and stares, momentarily distracted from her pursuit of Alain by this awe-inspiring sight.

She comes off the pasture rim into the crowd and is immediately swallowed up by the throng.

She weaves through the crowd, a growing sense of hopelessness on her face, so daunting is the task of finding him in this multitude.

ELSEWHERE IN THE COVA

Alain searches for Michelle among the rain-soaked pilgrims with a similar despair... limping on his injured leg.

He bumps into a newspaper man taking notes, his photographer beside him shielding his camera from the rain with his coat.

He passes people in wheelchairs and on crutches.

A blind woman and her son.

A group of peasants gathered in prayer.

And a few steps beyond three well-to-do women wearing expensive dresses, on their knees in the mud, praying.

MICHELLE

moves through the crowd not far behind Alain.

She stops and stares hopelessly at the wall of people in front of her. Suddenly two large men appear behind her clearing a path through the crowd.

Followed by three children walking through the mud --

Out front is LUCIA DOS SANTOS (10). Dark and plain, she wears a white veil and a rose wreath in her hair and walks perfectly erect through the crowd. Her eyes are downcast, her hands held together in prayer. The plain hand-carved rosary of a peasant intertwined in her fingers.

As she passes people call to her, bless her and shout out petitions for stricken loved-ones - a gauntlet of all the ills of humanity laid at her feet. With a flash of her dark eyes she acknowledges the most pathetic calls, but continues on with a singleness of purpose from which no distraction may turn her away.

Behind her comes a gloomy, dark-featured boy - nine-year-old FRANCISCO MARTO. He dons a drooping wool cap, short jacket and vest, and with his guarded expression gives the overall impression of being a miniature man. He leads by the hand his sister...

JACINTA MARTO (7) an angelic looking girl with large dark eyes and olive-brown skin. She too wears a white veil and rose wreath.

The crowd parts as they pass, staring in wonderment at the young visionaries.

Michelle watches them walk by an arm's length away.

Little Jacinta smiles at her. And for a moment Michelle loses all thought of Alain as she watches the children...

Approach a small holm oak tree where a rickety wooden arch has been erected like a shrine.

ALAIN

Pushes his way through the crowd and sees...

The children walk up and immediately drop to their knees before the holm oak, which is now really nothing more than a leafless three-foot stump decorated with silk bows and wild flowers.

Lucia turns to the crowd.

LUCIA

Lower your umbrellas.

The people around her comply and like a ripple across a pond all the umbrellas come down.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

Let us pray the rosary.

NOTE: From now until Lucia stands the voices of people praying the rosary will be heard in the background. A rosary that was cut short by Lucia as we are about to see.

MICHELLE

Moves forward for a closer look and spots Alain amid the crowd. She gasps, shoves her way toward him.

Alain watches the children pray on their knees.

Lucia blesses herself as a light blue mist descends and hovers over the holm oak then is whisked away by a breeze.

People react as if bathed by a fan. Smiling. Savoring the coolness of the air.

Alain looks on, captivated, but then as if he senses her presence he turns and SEES...

Michelle moving toward through the crowd.

Husband and wife hold still for a moment, staring in disbelief through the drizzling rain. They rush together and embrace.

MICHELLE

Alain!

Alain kisses Michelle. Pulls back and kisses her again. Tears rolling down Michelle's cheeks.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

I found you, I found you. Oh, thank God.

Michelle's words seem to filter through their thoughts and they turn to the children.

At this point Lucia has stopped praying and is looking up above the holm oak speaking to the vision out of earshot of Alain and Michelle. The ten-year-old girl nods deferentially.

Stands and turns and points to the sky.

LUCIA

Oh, look at the sun!

IN THE SKY

Black clouds part like drawn curtains and the sun appears, brilliantly normal at first... but then it palls over and appears like a glazed circular of mother-of-pearl.

ALAIN AND MICHELLE

Hold each other as they watch the sun.

The people around them staring up with unshielded eyes. Letting out gasps as the...

THE ODD-LOOKING SUN TREMBLES

and spins like a pinwheel at the top of sky. Emitting colors. Turning shades of blue... green... and golden yellow.

Bathing the COVA in multicolored light.

ALAIN

looks at Michelle in a rose-colored light. She smiles, joyfully, and they both look around the Cova and up at the

SPINNING SUN

The rose-color light fades back to mother-of-pearl as the sun slows, then resumes spinning. Now faster than before, throwing out beams of brilliant colors that are even more beautiful than the spectacle from moments before.

PEOPLE

around the Cova break out in prayer.

Fall to their knees and bless themselves.

Uttering "Our Fathers" and "Hail Marys"...

Calling it a miracle and praising God.

Then the sun stops... holds for a moment... then resumes its spinning for a third time.

THE PHOTOGRAPHER

takes a picture, the newsman next to him with his mouth agape.

A SOLDIER'S

rifle slips from his hand.

MICHELLE

looks over at...

THE CHILDREN

who kneel beneath the holm oak staring serenely at the sun, their hands clasped in prayer. The colorful light plays off their innocent faces and they glow with an unearthly purity.

MICHELLE

taps Alain, who turns and looks at the three children kneeling in prayer.

The light changes, grows dull again and Alain and Michelle look up at...

THE SUN

once again like a pewter plate spinning in the sky.

It spins, shakes, then suddenly DROPS TOWARD THE EARTH!

Expanding, growing brighter, burning brilliantly as the familiar yellow ball.

People SCREAM!

Fall to the ground and pray.

FROM THE CROWD -

"IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD!"

"GOD, HELP US!"

"NO!, MOTHER OF GOD!"

The GIANT YELLOW BALL comes closer and the SCREAMS rise.

All the while the children just watch in calm fascination.

Alain pulls Michelle tight into his arms as the SUN EXPANDS and the end comes.

MICHELLE

clings to Alain, closes her eyes when a CHEER goes up from the crowd.

Alain and Michelle look up at the sun...

THE GIANT YELLOW BALL

has stopped expanding and now just hangs in the sky.

It starts to shrink and recede...

As it returns to its rightful place in the sky.

The Crowd ROARS!

People burst into tears. Hug each other. Fall to their knees and pray.

Alain turns from the sun and looks at Michelle, in a moment of lost speech and shared understanding. He smiles and finds the words...

ALAIN

Oh, thank God.

They turn to the children who are carried past him in the arms of three large men.

The crowd pressing in from all sides. Calling out questions.

"WHAT DID THE BLESSED MOTHER SAY?"

"WHAT DOES THIS MIRACLE MEAN?"

"WILL THE WAR END?"

Alain and Michelle move with the crowd.

A VOICE FROM THE CROWD

Look! My clothes are dry! Everything
is dry!

People feel their dry clothes, amazed, for indeed people's clothes, hair, and even the ground are now dry.

Alain taps his foot on the dried mud. Runs his hands through Michelle's hair, miraculous. They laugh and embrace.

EXT. LEIRA ROAD - COVA DA IRIA - DAY

By the side of the road the inspector and several Portuguese policemen are engage in an heated AD-LIBBED DEBATE about the miracle they have just witnessed.

As the crowd shuffles by, the inspector, holding Alain's service photo, appears torn between keeping an eye out for Alain and adding his say to the debate.

Farther back in the crowd Alain and Michelle approach. Alain notices the group of policemen and stops, Michelle too.

ALAIN

Come on, this way.

He leads Michelle off the road and out of the crowd.

EXT. ALJUSTREL COUNTRYSIDE - SERIES OF SHOTS

Of Alain and Michelle walking up a rock-strewn hill.

Through a LUSH GLEN.

And across a FIELD toward a weather-beaten barn.

INT. BARN - DAY

Alain and Michelle enter and climb a ladder into the loft where they sit down in the hay.

A curious magpie observes them from atop the open hay door.

ALAIN

Don't mind us, little fellow. It's just for the night.

The bird flies off and they follow him with their eyes - gazing out the open door at an overcast sunset.

After a quiet moment.

ALAIN (CONT'D)

Tomorrow I'll find the motorbike and get some petrol for it. We'll have to avoid Lisbon, but I was thinking we should head for the coast.

MICHELLE

Yes, of course, whatever's best.

They gaze out at the sunset for a long quiet moment.

ALAIN

(softly)

It was a miracle I found you in that crowd.

MICHELLE

I know, a day filled with miracles.

They share a quiet moment.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

It's funny, but while it was happening, I wasn't really thinking of what I was seeing. I was just thinking of you, of our life together.

ALAIN

Cherie, I'm in a great deal of trouble.

MICHELLE

I know.

She kisses Alain. Draws back and looks in his eyes.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Tell me tomorrow...

She kisses hem again, lovingly at first, then with a hunger born of a great passion.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Frosty dawn. The magpie lands on a fence, chirps. In the distance a police car drives past the farm.

INT. BARN - DAY

Alain wakes up with Michelle in his arms. He removes a bit of straw from her hair. Stares lovingly at her face - so peaceful and pure. He clenches his jaw, holds back tears.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Alain works a piston-style pump. Splashes his face with water. Looks around the perfectly quiet farm.

Beneath an apple tree Alain stares out at the sunrise, lost in thought. After a moment he takes out Michelle's rosary, kneels in the grass and blesses himself.

ALAIN

This rosary is for the repose of the soul of Emile Dufay... of Liege. We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. We believe in...

EXT. BARN - DAY

A YOUNG PORTUGUESE POLICEMAN approaches the barn. He rounds the corner of the barn and stops in his tracks.

ALAIN

Rises off his knees and plucks an apple from the tree. A SCUFFING SOUND comes from behind him. He turns and faces the young policeman who points a revolver, nervously.

YOUNG POLICEMAN

Put up your hands!

Alain's eyes go from the gun to the policeman's boyish face.

YOUNG POLICEMAN (CONT'D)

Hands up!

ALAIN

Easy. I won't run.

The young policeman waves the gun. Alain raises his hands.

The boy is scared, at a lost what to do. He turns and looks toward the highway and Alain takes a quick step and knocks the gun from his hand.

The boy scampers after the gun and Alain shoves him aside. Picks up the gun and points it at the...

The young policeman who turns his face.

Alain holds his aim. Looks around... Not a soul in sight.

He looks at the barn and back to the young man. Raises the gun as if to strike, then lowers it, waffling between shooting and hitting the youngster.

The young policeman ventures a peek. And when Alain looks into his eyes he knows what to do.

He throws the gun aside.

ALAIN (CONT'D)

Get out of here...
(full-throated)
Go on! GO!

The young policeman staggers to his feet and sprints away.

Alain watches him go. Turns and looks back at the barn.

INT. BARN - DAY

Michelle finger-combs her hair. Shakes out the straw. Alain climbs into the loft carrying an apple.

MICHELLE

Good morning. What's this, breakfast
in bed?

Alain hands her the apple and sits beside her. Michelle takes a bite.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

I don't think an apple ever tasted
so good. I'm famished. I haven't
eaten a thing since breakfast
yesterday.
(gives him a bite)
Just like Adam and Eve.

Alain's eyes well up.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

ALAIN

Nothing. I'm just happy. That's all.

A devastated look washes over Michelle, fades before it is fully complete. She musters a smile.

MICHELLE

Tell me again about Canada. Please.
Where we'll live, how many children
we'll have, and all of their names.

She lays back in the hay and looks lovingly at Alain.

At first, the words are hard to find, but then Alain speaks and as he does, he gets a look as if he can actually see what might have been had their fates taken a different turn.

ALAIN

Once we reach the coast, we'll board
a ship for Canada. We'll go to Quebec.
There, we will live on a farm on the
outskirts of Montreal, beside a blue
lake, blue as the periwinkles I'll
pick every spring from a field behind
our home...

EXT. BARN - DAY

Three police cars turn off a dirt road onto the farm.

ALAIN (V.O.)

We'll have two boys and two girls
and name them after the people we've
loved and lost...

EXT. FRENCH STOCKADE - DAY

A castle-like stockade in a French town. It's cold. The
dead of winter. Everything glistening and white from a
snowfall the night before.

A horse-drawn sled, decorated for the Christmas season, passes
by two guards standing before the front gate.

INT. ALAIN'S CELL - SECOND IMPRISONMENT - NIGHT

Michelle sits on a bench outside a jail cell. A stern-looking
GUARD stands nearby.

Within the cell, Father Desailly sits on a stool beside Alain
who kneels and receives absolution.

Father DeSailly blesses him then comes out of the cell. He
stops before Michelle, who stands.

FATHER DESAILLY

He's ready for you.
(sotto voce)
Be strong.

Michelle nods and steps toward the open cell. The guard blocks her way.

STERN GUARD

No physical contact. Understand?

Michelle nods and the guard steps aside. Father DeSailly takes a seat on the bench.

Alain, in prison clothes, watches Michelle come in. They stare at each other and, despite the instructions, Michelle instinctively steps toward him to give him a hug.

Alain gives an almost imperceptible shake of the head and she stops. Holds back tears.

ALAIN

Cherie... It's good to see you. You look great.

Michelle finds it hard to speak. This pains Alain and he forces a smile, gestures toward her waist.

ALAIN (CONT'D)

It doesn't show.

Michelle touches her belly.

MICHELLE

I'm only three months along.

She half-smiles and puts on a good face, but the tears are now streaming down her cheeks.

ALAIN

That's good, he'll be born in the summer?

MICHELLE

(wipes a tear)
He?

ALAIN

Just a feeling. If it is a boy, I want you to promise to name him Emile... All right?

MICHELLE

After your little friend?

ALAIN

Yes. Do you like it?

Michelle nods. Tries her best to smile back, but manages just a trembling effort. Her anguish is like a stab into Alain's heart and he takes a more formal tone to help her bear up.

ALAIN (CONT'D)

I don't want you there tomorrow.
You're to go back to Lisbon, today.
Understand?

Michelle breaks down.

Father DeSailly stands and takes a step toward Michelle.

Alain motions for him to wait and the priest stops outside the cell door.

ALAIN (CONT'D)

Cherie.

Michelle looks up. Alain takes her rosary out from around his neck and looks at the guard. He nods okay and Alain hands it to her.

Michelle can't believe her eyes. She looks it over just to be sure.

MICHELLE

How?

ALAIN

How indeed?

A spark of hope springs up in Michelle's eyes.

STERN GUARD

Time's up.

Alain looks plaintively at the guard, but resigned to the situation, says nothing.

Father DeSailly comes in and puts an arm around Michelle. Guides her to the door.

Alain watches her go, a yearning to go to her held in check.

At the door, Michelle breaks free of the priest and runs into Alain's arms, hugs and kisses him.

MICHELLE

Oh, my love!... My love!

The guard hurries in and separates her from Alain. Hands her to Father DeSailly who gently guides a weeping Michelle out of the cell and down a corridor.

Alain stands there staring after Michelle as the cell door closes in his face.

EXT. COURTYARD - MILITARY PRISON - DAY

A wooden post rises out of the snow before a stone wall pockmarked with bullet holes.

Nearby a FRENCH CAPTAIN stands beside a firing squad detail. Waiting in the cold. Exhaling puffs of frosty breath.

Perpendicular to them and a few meters back a platoon of soldiers serve as witnesses.

Somewhere a drummer TAPS OUT A DIRGE.

Across the courtyard General Papin and several officers in heavy overcoats emerge from a prison door. Come and stand with the witnesses.

General Papin looks at the captain, who in turn looks to two guards who bracket another door to the prison.

One of the guards enters the prison. Returns with Alain.

The two guards walk Alain to the post. The TAP-TAP-TAP of the drummer in time with their steps that crunch in the snow.

Alain looks up at...

The slate-gray sky...

At the firing squad, witnesses and...

General Papin who averts his eyes and looks at his feet.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE PRISON

Michelle and Father DeSailly walk up to the gate and peer in. The drummer's DIRGE ECHOING off a stone building which blocks Michelle's view of the execution.

IN THE COURTYARD

Alain is tied to the post.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE PRISON

Michelle hurries ahead of Father DeSailly along a stretch of prison wall with concertina wire on top. She slips in the snow. Gets to her feet and hurries on.

IN THE COURTYARD

The captain approaches Alain with a blindfold.

ALAIN
I'd rather you didn't.

The captain nods respectfully and steps back.

OUTSIDE THE PRISON

Father DeSailly catches up to Michelle who stands next to the prison wall listening.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)
Detail!...

ON THE CAPTAIN

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
load!

RIFLE BOLTS

CLANK open. Single bullets are loaded into the chambers.

ALAIN

Stiffens.

MICHELLE

Drops to her knees, prays with her rosary beads.

THE CAPTAIN

Looks again at General Papin, who nods.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
Ready!

ALAIN

Clenches his jaw, readies himself, and at that moment a beam of light shines on his face.

Alain looks up and smiles.

OVERHEAD

the sun pops through a pocket in the clouds and a finger of sparkling light shines down on Alain.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
Take aim!... Fire!

The arrayed rifle barrels discharge.

MICHELLE

Crumples to the ground as the SOUND OF SIX RIFLE REPORTS cuts the air. Father DeSailly kneels with her and she cries against his chest, her rosary clutched in her hand.

EXT. STREET - FRENCH TOWN - DAY

Michelle walks with Father DeSailly down a stoneflagged street patched with snow. Her face is stained with tears, but she holds herself erect and wears the expression of a person whose emotional bank is empty.

FATHER DESAILLY

What time is your train tomorrow?

MICHELLE

One o'clock.

FATHER DESAILLY

I serve mass at eleven, but if you don't mind waiting after the burial service, I can take you to the station afterward. Otherwise I can get a friend to take you.

MICHELLE

I don't mind waiting. Thank you.

FARTHER ON

They come upon a small snow-draped church with half its roof blown away. Michelle stops and stares.

INT. SHELLED CHURCH - DAY

Michelle and Father DeSailly enter and bless themselves with holy water from the granite stoup.

The church is lit with candles and near the alter a shaft of sunlight enters in through the damaged roof illuminating a small wedding party - a bride and groom, a priest and a handful of relatives.

Michelle and Father DeSailly slip into a pew and watch the ceremony.

The bride and groom kneel. The priest blesses them. And the groom reaches over and takes his bride's hand.

A beautiful alto-soprano voice SINGS SCHUBERT'S "AVE MARIA".

Michelle looks over at the singer - a pretty young girl of fifteen wearing a white veil.

Michelle watches the ceremony then looks toward the end of the pew at a painting of the Blessed Mother on the wall.

An inscription beneath reads "I CANNOT PROMISE YOU HAPPINESS IN THIS WORLD, ONLY THE NEXT... OUR LADY OF LOURDES".

Michelle lets the MUSIC sweep over her. She is crying, but through her tears, she smiles.

THE END