

"MON TRIOMPHE"

Valerie L.Valdez
201 West Vardeman
Killeen, Texas 76541
Ph. 512-231-9264
valvalvaldez2002@yahoo.com
WGA Registration #1293823

FADE IN:

EXT. ABANDONED FIELD - DAY

The heavens fondle the earth. Clouds mingle in the sky. A breeze strokes the trees. A broken wooden fence shelters the field like an aged guard. Birds serenade the meadow.

Two horses graze under a tree's bent branches like a shroud. A beige horse wears a bell on a rope around its neck. A smaller bronze horse wears none.

A car's motor creeps on the road outside the field. It idles then carves a path through the bushes and stops. The horses sink into the shadows. The birds soar off in shock. The wind ceases startled by the stranger.

LYDIA CHAMBERS, 30's, exits the car and walks like a unbaked clay statue, pliable on the outside but with a firm core. Lydia raises her hat's brim to reveal quivering blood vessels beneath her skin. Her eyes dart to explore the view.

Lydia hauls painting supplies from the car into the field. The horses peek out from the shroud as she sketches on a canvas. Birds return to their place in the trees.

The horses roam in front of her, sniff the air then graze unconcerned. The beige horse shakes his head. The bell chimes. The birds harmonize. The field sounds like a cathedral.

LATER

A shadow sneaks up on the ground behind Lydia as she paints. The horse jerks its head up. The bell clangs again. Lydia looks up. The shadow vanishes among the trees unnoticed.

MOMENTS LATER

Lydia rests against the car. An object glistens in front of the easel unseen by her; it glows again. She still doesn't see it. The wind slaps her hat off to float on top of it. She gets the hat, sees the object and picks up ...

LYDIA

A key? Mon Triomphe, three-fifteen?

She blows dirt off of it, and turns the key over.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Return for a reward?

EXT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Lydia's car is parked outside a pristine cottage.

INT. COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

She wanders into her studio. ALEX, her cat, follows her. She turns on a desk lamp and holds up the key. She bites into it.

LYDIA

It's a gold key, Alex. It looks new.

Alex reclines on the desk. Lydia finds a phone book. She slumps into a chair and searches through it. She dials a phone.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Operator, I'm trying to find a listing for someplace named Mon Triomphe. I'm renting a cottage in St. Claire so, I'm not familiar with the area. I found a key that says Mon Triomphe three fifteen. Do you have a listing for it? None. Have you ever heard of it? Thanks anyway.

He meows and climbs onto her lap as she slides deeper into the chair.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

A lost gold key found in a deserted field. It offers a reward if returned. What kind of reward?

Lydia flips out the light. The moonlight descends through the window to reveal her silhouette. She twirls the key between her fingers as Alex paws at it.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Lydia's car pierces through the meadow again. She sets up the easel and paints. The horses recognize her and continue to graze. The birds ignore her and chirp in the trees.

The same shadow as before reappears on the ground behind her.

SARA

You found it.

Lydia drops her brush, and stiffens as she turns to face the voice.

SARA (CONT'D)

I didn't mean to interrupt you.

SARA EVANS, 40's, freezes in her spot like a hand-made doll without enough stuffing. The horses fix their eyes on her. Sara steps back as Lydia reaches down to retrieve the brush.

LYDIA

It's okay. I didn't expect to find anyone here.

SARA

I know this field well. You've really captured its glory.

LYDIA

Thanks. I just started. It took me awhile to find this spot. It's deserted but what a great view.

Sara dares a step forward.

SARA

I was on my walk when I saw you yesterday. I didn't want to disturb you, but I couldn't help myself today.

Lydia softens her posture.

LYDIA

I'm Lydia Chambers. It's nice to meet you. Thanks for the compliment, but I'm not sure how wonderful it will be when I'm finished.

She strides forward with extended hand. Sara returns the handshake. Lydia feels something rough on her palm. Sara snaps her hand away and shoves it into her pocket.

SARA

I'm Sara Evans. I'm so pleased to meet you.

LYDIA

You must live close by if you were out for a walk.

SARA

I live off the main road about a mile away. I take my morning walk through the field.

Sara steps forward and fixes her gaze on the horizon.

SARA (CONT'D)

I love it here. It is my favorite
place; ever.

Lydia searches the view.

LYDIA

Do you see something?

Sara regains her poise.

SARA

I was thinking how the sunlight
enhances the colors of the sky.

LYDIA

You sound like an artist.

SARA

I am a retired teacher. I live in
my father's house. He died a few
years ago. Did you and your family
move into the area?

LYDIA

I'm single and just renting a cottage
as a studio for the summer. I'll
return to Vancouver to sell my work.

Sara ambles up to the easel.

SARA

You won't have any problems. I would
like to buy it.

LYDIA

Maybe you should wait until it is
finished. It is only a rough sketch.

SARA

I must have it, if I can afford it.

LYDIA

I haven't earned your praise or your
money yet.

The horse's bell rings as it wanders off. The other one
follows. The women hear it.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

It sounds like a church bell.

SARA

It is an old farmer's secret. The smaller horse is blind. A bell is tied around the sighted horse to signal the blind one where to follow. Otherwise, it would get lost.

LYDIA

That's a great idea. Maybe people should try it.

SARA

I agree because some people can be very blind. I've always thought that God's simplest creatures are his finest. They show no prejudice or malice. They're kind and loving souls who don't judge, or hurt you.

Sara realizes her sudden honesty. Her eyes search the ground.

SARA (CONT'D)

I have taken enough of your time. I will get on with my walk. I hope to see you again, Lydia.

Sara strolls away.

LYDIA

Good-bye, Sara.

Lydia returns to her canvas. She puts her hand in her pocket to retrieve a cleaning rag. The key falls onto the ground. She picks it up, thinks for second then calls after Sara.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Excuse me, Sara. Excuse me. By chance do you know of a place named Mon Triomphe?

Sara freezes. Lydia approaches her but she doesn't turn around.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

I found this key here. I think it is gold. The name says Mon Triomphe, three-fifteen, return for a reward. If it's gold imagine what the reward must be like.

Sara's right hand digs deeper in her pocket.

SARA

I don't know anything about it. Why do you ask?

LYDIA

Since you live here, I thought you would know about it.

SARA

Maybe someone lost it years ago.

LYDIA

It looks new. I'm certain it belongs to someplace close. I called directory service but there is no listing for a Mon Triomphe. The letters are in red, see?

Lydia holds the key in front of Sara.

SARA

Get it away from me.

Sara shoves it away with her right hand. Lydia notices a scar. Sara clenches her fist.

SARA (CONT'D)

I don't know anything.

LYDIA

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. I just want to return it for the reward.

SARA

I must continue with my walk. Bye.

Lydia watches her disappear into the trees. She scans the field then settles her gaze on the horses.

LYDIA

This is a strange field, isn't it?

To her shock, they nod their heads in agreement.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

The town is small with the simple appearance of a time past. A grocery store sits between the bakery and post office with a sign in the window which reads St. Claire, BC. Lydia's car is parked outside.

INT. GROCERY STORE - CONTINUOUS

Lydia stands at the checkout counter with her groceries. The CLERK, 17, a pimply teenager, pops her gum and scans items as Lydia struggles to get her attention.

LYDIA
Excuse me. Excuse me.

The clerk glances her way.

LYDIA (CONT'D)
I'm trying to find a place so I can return something I found. I thought maybe you could help me.

CLERK
What place?

LYDIA
Do you know of a Mon Triomphe?

CLERK
Nope. That's twenty-four-sixty.

Lydia gets the money from her purse. She hands it to the clerk then addresses the BAG BOY, 16.

LYDIA
Have you ever heard of it?

BAG BOY
No.

Lydia retrieves the key from her pocket. She hands it to the clerk then collects her grocery bags. The clerk looks at it then shows it to the bag boy.

LYDIA
I found the key in a field nearby. It says return for a reward. That's what I am trying to do.

The clerk raises her eyebrows with a shrug.

CLERK
It doesn't say anything.

LYDIA
Yes, it does.

CLERK
Where?

LYDIA

It is on the front and back of it.

The clerk holds up the key and flips it over; it is blank on both sides.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

What? Wait a minute.

Lydia grabs the key.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

I found it in a field when I was painting. It has red letters that say Mon Triomphe, three-fifteen, return for a reward.

A customer behind Lydia clears his throat.

CLERK

I have other customers.

Lydia flips the key over in disbelief. The man behind her pushes his groceries onto the counter. The clerk ignores Lydia and scans them.

LYDIA

It is in red letters and says Mon Triomphe, three-fifteen, return for a reward. I'm not making it up. I saw it.

The clerk rolls her eyes.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

I don't understand how it disappeared. I'm not imagining it. This place has to exist somewhere, doesn't it?

Lydia glances at the clerk and other customers. She looks embarrassed then grabs her bags and leaves.

INT. LYDIA'S CAR - DAY

LYDIA

(aloud)

I swear I saw it on the key.

She pulls the key from her pocket and examines it again. The car jerks to a stop.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Mon Triomphe, three-fifteen, return
for a reward. I don't believe it.
You appear then vanish. What kind
of a key are you?

Lydia realizes she stopped in front of the field. She spies
a figure in the meadow through the broken brush.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Sara stands transfixed by the horizon. The horses stop
grazing as Lydia steps up behind her.

LYDIA

Sara? Sara, are you okay?

SARA

No.

LYDIA

What's wrong?

Sara clenches her right hand by her side.

SARA

You found it. That is what's wrong.

Lydia moves beside her.

LYDIA

Found what?

SARA

My past and now your future.

EXT. SARA'S COTTAGE - DAY

Paint peels from the warped frame of a worn house. Thick
brush almost seals the door like a tomb. Dim lights pry
through faded drapes.

INT. SARA'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Lydia roams through the living room. She rubs her arms to
ward off the chill. The fireplace is empty; no blaze to
give the room much needed warmth.

A photo sits on the mantel of a man in a military uniform.
Beside it is an elegant box with a blue rose in front of it.
Lydia touches the box. The lid opens.

She peeks inside as Sara enters then closes it. She places a tea tray on a table.

LYDIA

If you like, I'll make a fire for you?

SARA

No, I don't care for a fire. Some tea will warm you. That is a photo of my father when he was in the Army.

LYDIA

I see the resemblance. He looks like he's about to give an order.

SARA

I cared for him after my mother died. He retired from the army years before, but remained rigid to the end. I look like him but that's all.

Lydia steps to the sofa as Sara hands her a cup. They sit.

LYDIA

What does that mean?

SARA

He and I thought differently.

LYDIA

How?

SARA

Very different.

LYDIA

Sometimes parents protect us too much.

SARA

That's why we argued.

Sara blushes at her honesty, again.

LYDIA

I know the feeling. So, what did your dad protect you from?

SARA

Things.

Lydia smells an opportunity.

LYDIA

Was Mon Triomphe one of those things?

The spoon rattles on the saucer as Sara's hand trembles.

SARA

Yes.

Lydia sieges the opportunity. She takes the key from her pocket. The red letters glow. Sara reaches out her right hand. The scar is visible now. She makes no effort to conceal it.

LYDIA

Sara, what is Mon Triomphe?

As she takes the key from Lydia, a small spark of electricity passes between them. Sara's shocked and drops it.

INT. SARA'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Sara escapes into the kitchen with the tray. Lydia hurries after her. She puts the cups in the sink.

LYDIA

You're not telling me everything about Mon Triomphe, are you?

Sara squeezes the tea cup.

SARA

No.

Her grip tightens.

LYDIA

Does it have to do with your father?

Sara cracks the cup. Lydia sees drops of blood drip into the sink.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

My God, Sara.

INT. SARA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sara slumps in the sofa. She glares at her father's photo. Lydia sits beside her, and wipes blood from Sara's cut to expose the scar.

LYDIA

Does it hurt?

SARA
More than you know.

LYDIA
I mean the wound.

SARA
Which one?

LYDIA
Sara, where did you get the scar?
She flinches and bites her lips as she swallows.

SARA
In a dream.

LYDIA
I don't understand.

SARA
I found a key in the field years ago like you. I thought it was a trinket and ignored it. A few days later the dream began. In it I stood in the field holding the key. I repeated over and over I believe. How silly. Then a magnificent building appeared out of nowhere. The doors opened and I walked inside. When I awoke I didn't believe it. Just a crazy dream but it haunted me for days.

LYDIA
What happened then?

Sara walks to the mantel almost in a trance.

SARA
Finally, I went to the field as I did in the dream. At first nothing happened. Then the wind blew so strongly it almost knocked me over. I couldn't keep my eyes open. When it stopped, Mon Triomphe stood before me. I had never seen anything like it. The doors opened and I walked inside.

Lydia leans forward stunned but intrigued.

LYDIA
What did you find?

Sara rubs her scar.

SARA
My reward. Omar.

Sara props herself on the mantel for support. Her eyes fall upon her father's photo. She caresses the box. It opens and an unknown melody plays. Lydia is startled by the music.

SARA (CONT'D)
I met him there. Omar was a splendid man, so kind. We talked until dawn. That night seemed perfect, almost magical. He gave me the box as a gift. It won't play if anyone else opens it, only for me. I saw you touch it earlier. I left for home but promised Omar I would return. I packed some clothes and was almost out the door when my father arrived. I tried to hide the key but he took it, and threw it into the fire. He demanded to know where I spent the night. I told him I was leaving for good. He called me a whore.

She freezes in her place.

SARA (CONT'D)
Then he took a poker and retrieved the key from the fire. I fought but he pressed it into my hand searing my flesh. He told me no man would want me now. The room number four-eleven is still visible.

Sara holds her hand in front of a mirror on the mantle. Lydia rises to stand beside her. She sees the scar's reflection. Sara takes a charred key out of the box.

SARA (CONT'D)
I returned to the field with it but Mon Triomphe never reappeared. I lost Omar forever. Our first hello became our last good-bye.

Lydia is silent, lost in disbelief. She comforts Sara.

LYDIA
I'm so sorry for you. I wish I knew what to say. I think it is best for me to leave, Sara.

Sara composes herself.

SARA
You don't believe me.

LYDIA
Don't worry about what I believe.

SARA
I've never told this story to anyone.
I want to know what you think.

LYDIA
I barely know you.

SARA
I feel I can trust you. Please tell
me.

LYDIA
I think maybe you created the story
as a way to work out issues with
your father. Besides, if your story
were true, then why didn't I have a
dream? I found a key, too.

SARA
You asked questions and tried to
find Mon Triomphe, so you were certain
it existed somewhere. I wasn't so
the dream came to persuade me that
it was real. Lydia, to you I am
probably a scarred and lonely woman
who grieves for a lost love.

LYDIA
Sara, put yourself in my place.

SARA
I was you. Now, you are me.

LYDIA
We are not alike. I won't stand in
a field waiting for a vision to
appear. Anyway, I don't have
religious beliefs. That is like
throwing paint on a shadow for me.
I only believe in what I can see and
touch.

SARA
You have no idea what can see and
touch you everyday.

Sara picks up the key and hands it to her.

LYDIA
I'm not like you, Sara.

SARA
I think you are more than you realize.
I lied because I rarely walk through
the field anymore. A sensation of
some kind told me to visit it
yesterday. There must be a reason
why we met.

Lydia places the key on the mantel, and heads to the door.

LYDIA
I am sorry but I don't believe your
story. I hope you can use the key
to find some peace.

SARA
It can only be used by the one who
found it.

LYDIA
Sara, I don't want it.

SARA
You were so eager for your reward.
Now, you don't believe in it.

LYDIA
I stopped believing in anything a
long time ago.

SARA
Why?

LYDIA
Let's forget stories about scars,
and a reward and visions.

SARA
I sense you may have a scar of your
own.

Blood vessels quiver beneath Lydia's skin.

LYDIA
That's enough.

SARA
Perhaps what you are hiding from has
found you here.

LYDIA

Stop it.

She stiffens and stares in icy silence.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Whatever is in that field can't change the past. So, what's the point now?

SARA

That is what you must find out.

LYDIA

If I don't?

She takes the key from the mantel and walks to Lydia. She places it in her palm.

SARA

Can you spend your life wondering what your reward might have been?

EXT. FIELD - DAY

The birds sing in the trees while the horses graze. They perk up their ears as Lydia drives into the field. She stops, gets out and walks to the center. She stares at the horizon.

LYDIA

Excuse me. Excuse me. Sara sent me. Do you remember her? This is stupid.

The birds are silent. The horses stand still. She holds the key in front of her.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Come to me. Come to me, Mon Triomphe.

Nothing happens. She repeats the words with less enthusiasm.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Let's try it again. Come to me Mon Triomphe whatever you are. Hello? I'm talking to you.

Lydia grows restless so she sits on the ground. The horses walk toward the trees and disappear in the shadow. She sits in the Lotus position and chants.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

I believe. I believe. Come to me.

She opens her eyes. Nothing has happened. She groans.

LATER

The birds snooze in the trees. Lydia glances at them as she slumps against the car. She grows impatient and looks around the field. She steps forward and holds up the key.

LYDIA

Hello? I have the key for three-fifteen. I hope it has a good view. What are you waiting for anyway? I've been here for an hour. Do you want me or not? If that's how you feel, then the same to you.

Lydia heaves the key into the trees. She kicks dust at the horizon. Then the bell rings. The horses trot out of the shadows toward her. The beige one holds the key in his mouth. The smaller one follows. She stands shocked in a dust cloud.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Whoa. Whoa.

The beige horse holds the key up to her.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Is this for real?

He shakes his head yes. Her chin sinks, and her eyes glaze.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

This is a joke.

The horses shake their heads no. She holds her breath. The beige one steps closer with the key in its mouth.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

How do you understand me? I don't believe it. I'm talking to horses in an empty field like an idiot.

The horses pound the ground with their hoofs. Lydia jumps back.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I didn't mean that you are idiots. You're obviously smart horses.

The horses nod their heads yes. She gasps.

LYDIA (CONT'D)
God, this is unbelievable.

They nod no then step closer.

LYDIA (CONT'D)
Do you remember Sara?

They nod yes.

LYDIA (CONT'D)
That's it. She sent you out here
with the key.
(calls to the trees)
Sara? I know it's you. Come on
out. Sara?

They shake their heads no.

LYDIA (CONT'D)
Oh, my God. This is really happening.

They shake their heads yes.

LYDIA (CONT'D)
Can you tell me if Mon Triomphe
exists?

They nod yes.

LYDIA (CONT'D)
Will I find my reward there?

They nod yes. She catches her breath then sighs.

LYDIA (CONT'D)
Do you know what kind of reward it
is? A car? A new house? Lots of
money?

The horses shake their heads no.

LYDIA (CONT'D)
All right but give me a minute to
absorb all of this.
(beat)
Sara told me the story about the
bell. It signals your friend where
you are so he doesn't get lost. Its
wonderful how you care for him.

The beige horse nudges the blind one. She strokes him then
the blind horse.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

You're fortunate to have each other.

They nod their heads yes. Lydia wets her dry lips.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Can I tell you a secret?

The horses nod yes.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

I had an abortion when I was sixteen. My parents wouldn't let me keep the baby. My dad insisted it would ruin my life. I ran away but they found me. My mom said I was too young to understand, but one day I would thank them. After that, every time we fought over something else, it was really about the baby. A few years later, I won an art scholarship to college and just left for good. Last fall my dad had a stroke, but I didn't go home to see him. I thought now he knows what it feels like to have something die inside him. My mom stopped calling me after he passed.

The beige one holds up the key. Lydia grasp it.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

I don't understand why I'm here.

The horses step back. Lydia confronts the horizon, and is transfixed by its beauty.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

That is a perfect sight. More than I ever realized. Sara asked me what I believe, and I really don't know. I've never asked before. I don't think I wanted to know until now.

She holds the key in her clenched fist and closes her eyes.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

I believe.

A slight breeze blows. Birds huddle in the trees.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

I do believe.

The wind increases. Small clouds of dust swirls. The horses turn their heads away.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

I believe.

The breeze becomes a gust. Tree branches bend. The horses stand firm against it.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

I truly believe.

The force punches Lydia in the face; her blood vessels quiver and slams her eyes shut. The wind surrenders after a few seconds then calm returns to the field.

Lydia coughs and waves dust from her face. She scans the horizon and freezes. Her mouth falls. Her breathing halts. Her eyes swell. Mon Triomphe stands before her.

EXT. MON TRIOMPHE - NIGHT

A temple. A palace. A fortress. A prison.

It is a sight both magnificent and impossible. The horizon is transformed with a strange and heavenly beauty. A vision of power that is breathless consumes the view.

Lydia gawks in awe and fear. She gasps for air and collapses to her knees. She opens her mouth but no sound, no words. She catches her breath, wets her lips then finds her voice. Lydia calls to the horses.

LYDIA

Do you see it?

They nod yes.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Where did it come from? It was an empty field then the wind blew. I close my eyes for a few seconds and it appears. It's impossible.

The horses nod their heads no.

Mon Triomphe is a solid edifice with no windows on the front. The height and width are so great that she can't see the top of it nor around it. Two doors with no handles on the outside are the only entrance.

Lydia steadies herself then rises. She inches a few steps forward. The massive doors open as she approaches.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

My God, what have I done?

Lydia grips the key, and holds her breath. She glances at the horses who nod yes. She crosses the field to the threshold, pauses then walks inside as the vault-like doors close behind her.

The horses glance for a few more seconds then stroll away and graze unconcerned. The birds resume singing as Mon Triomphe disappears into the twilight.

INT. MON TRIOMPHE LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Lydia stands on the top of a dazzling staircase which leads into the main lobby. She is surrounded by unimaginable opulence. Everything sparkles. A magnificent chandelier hangs over the floor.

She stands with her mouth and eyes agape afraid to move or speak. Bellhops hurry through the lobby. Waiters with trays of food rush by. She hears the sound of elevator bells in the distance.

Guests lounge in chairs and sofas beside tables, and sip tea and chat. Men wear elegant suits with silk ties, and women are groomed in expensive dresses. They move with deliberate ease. All are oblivious to Lydia.

She remains frozen until a bellhop addresses her.

BELLHOP

Pardon me, Miss.

She realizes he is speaking to her.

LYDIA

What?

BELLHOP

Have you checked in?

It takes a few seconds for her to regain her thoughts.

LYDIA

No, I am trying to return this key.

He points to the reception desk, bows, and walks off.

She walks down the stairs. At the bottom, her eyes drool at everything ... unbelievable.

A commanding voice appears behind her. She pivots to face it.

MADRE DE

May I help you, mademoiselle?

The stately figure of the MADRE DE, 50's, engulfs her. His dark eyes almost fill their sockets with little white visible. A pin-stripe suit makes him look taller. His diamond tie pin flashes a reflection in Lydia's eyes blinding her briefly.

MADRE DE (CONT'D)

I asked if I may help you.

Lydia is numb in his presence, and wets her dry lips.

LYDIA

I am here to ...

He leans closer as she gulps.

MADRE DE

Yes?

She remembers the key.

LYDIA

I am here to return this key for a reward.

Lydia holds it out for him to see. His nostrils flair. Her hand trembles. She clasps her other hand to support it; now both hands tremble. A smile curls a corner of his mouth.

MADRE DE

Miss Lydia, the key belongs to you.

She is jolted at the sound of her name. He snaps his fingers for a bellhop and walks to the counter. She follows him.

LYDIA

Excuse me sir how do you know my name? Who are you? Where am I? I found the key, and want to return it for the reward.

MADRE DE

So you shall.

She walks in front of him to make him stop.

LYDIA

Please, wait and listen to me.

He is surprised by her insistence. His eyes narrow as he clasps his hands behind his back.

MADRE DE

Yes?

LYDIA

I did what Sara told me to do. I stood in the field with the key and said I believe then all of this appeared out of nowhere. Ask the horses if you don't believe it.

He leads her to the counter.

MADRE DE

You will.

LYDIA

You keep saying that.

MADRE DE

Miss Lydia Chambers, room three-fifteen is ready for you. Please sign in.

LYDIA

How do you know my name? I've never met you before.

MADRE DE

All of the arrangements have been made for you. Please, sign in.

A clerk behind the desk shows her the reservation book with her name on the page. He holds up a pen for her to sign.

LYDIA

That is my name but how did it get there? What arrangements? I don't understand anything about this place.

She puts the key on the desk.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Here is your key. Give me my reward and I will leave.

CLERK

First you must sign in. We have your reservation on hold.

LYDIA

Hold it for someone else because I'm not staying.

The Madre De holds up the pen in front of her.

MADRE DE

Please, sign in.

She collects some courage as she faces him.

LYDIA

Apparently I haven't made myself clear. I would like to collect my reward then go.

MADRE DE

All in due time. Patience is a virtue.

Lydia stiffens with defiance.

LYDIA

May I see your boss?

The clerk stares at her then at the Madre De, and backs away from the counter. The Madre De's smile at the corner of his mouth vanishes. He steps forward. She gulps again but doesn't back up.

MADRE DE

Please let me explain this to you once. I am the Madre De of Mon Triomphe. I advise you not to question me.

He barely touches her forehead with the back of his hand.

MADRE DE (CONT'D)

I think in all the excitement you're overheated. A rest before dinner will revitalize you.

She jerks her head away and looks at him confused.

MADRE DE (CONT'D)

Your reservation is for three twilights.

LYDIA

Did you hear what I said?

He holds up his hand to silence her.

MADRE DE

Time is designated here as dawn, mid-day, twilight and midnight. No exception. Those doors are the only entrance. No exception. You may leave only once but must return by the third twilight, or you can never return. No exception. Everything here for you is complimentary, but when you leave you can only take what you can carry. No exception.

She is thunderstruck and suspicious.

LYDIA

What's the catch?

MADRE DE

If you do not complete your stay then you forfeit your reward. No exception.

LYDIA

This can't be real.

The Madre De hears doubt in her voice.

MADRE DE

I beg your pardon?

LYDIA

There is no way any of this is real.

Guests in the lobby stop talking and notice her now.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

It's some illusion or vision, or mass hysteria.

The Madre De adjusts his tie as if it is too tight. He glances at the other guests who watch.

MADRE DE

No one has ever complained before.

LYDIA

You expect me to believe that everyone who comes here accepts all of this without question?

MADRE DE

Yes.

LYDIA

Then I'm not like everyone.

The remaining white around his eyes disappear.

MADRE DE

No.

He picks up a vase filled with flowers from the counter. He hands it to Lydia.

MADRE DE (CONT'D)

Take the vase, please.

She smells a trap.

LYDIA

Why?

MADRE DE

So many questions. Just take it.

She takes it. Her hands tremble again.

MADRE DE (CONT'D)

Now, drop it.

She stands motionless and looks at the vase. He shouts at her.

MADRE DE (CONT'D)

Drop it.

Startled, she drops the vase. It shatters and flowers and water spill onto the floor. He picks up a shard of glass, and cuts his hand. A line of blood appears.

MADRE DE (CONT'D)

Is that real enough for you?

Lydia's gaze penetrates him.

LYDIA

I don't know why I'm here.

MADRE DE

You will.

The clerk holds up the pen again. She sighs, takes the pen and signs beside her name.

MADRE DE (CONT'D)

(to a bellhop)

Show Miss Lydia to room three-fifteen.

(to her)

I hope you receive your reward.

Welcome to Mon Triomphe.

He bows. Still in shock, Lydia follows the bellhop down the hallway to the elevators. The Madre De licks the blood from his wound as he watches Lydia disappear.

INT. MON TRIOMPHE THIRD FLOOR - DAY

The elevator door opens and the bellhop steps out as Lydia follows him to a room. The bellhop inserts the key and opens the door.

INT. LYDIA'S SUITE - CONTINUOUS

Lydia enters the large suite. It is decorated in a unique and elegant style. She looks around dazed but intrigued.

The bellhop opens the doors to the enormous walk-in closet. She follows him.

LYDIA

Whose clothes are these?

BELLHOP

They are yours, Miss.

She looks at the labels.

LYDIA

Everything is in my size.

BELLHOP

Of course, this is your room.

He goes to the terrace and opens the doors. Sunlight floods the room. Lydia is startled by the instant brightness.

BELLHOP (CONT'D)

You have a lovely view of the garden.

He motions for her to approach. Lydia peeks out onto the balcony. She strains her neck side-to-side. The garden stretches farther than she can see. She returns to the suite.

LYDIA

Who are all the people in the garden,
and in the lobby?

BELLHOP

They are guests like you.

LYDIA

How did they get here?

BELLHOP

Miss Lydia, every guest finds a key somewhere, just as you did. They find their way to Mon Triomphe.

He hands the key to her. She twirls it in her fingers.

LYDIA

What if someone never find his way here?

He shrugs his shoulders.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Am I dreaming all of this?

BELLHOP

This is no dream. May I get anything for you?

LYDIA

I don't see a phone. How do I call my friends or 911?

He looks perplexed.

BELLHOP

I'm sorry but I don't know what you mean.

Now, she looks perplexed.

LYDIA

You've never heard of a telephone?

He shakes his head no.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

A gorgeous mansion appears out of thin air in a deserted field, and it is filled with people and gardens but no clocks or phones. Does any of this make sense to you?

He nods his head yes.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Where did you find your key?

BELLHOP
I woke up here.

LYDIA
Were you born here?

BELLHOP
I just woke up here.

LYDIA
Is this heaven?

BELLHOP
I don't know what that is, Miss Lydia.

LYDIA
You never heard of heaven?

BELLHOP
I only know this is Mon Triomphe.

LYDIA
The name means my triumph, but what
kind of triumph awaits me?

BELLHOP
For each guest it is different.

LYDIA
Don't you ever wonder about this
place?

BELLHOP
I never question Mon Triomphe, or my
reason for being here.

LYDIA
I have so many questions.

BELLHOP
Everyone noticed especially the Madre
De. He hates questions.

LYDIA
Don't ask, don't tell. Thanks for
the advise. What's your name? I'll
recommend you for employee-of-the-
month.

BELLHOP
The staff has no names, only the
guests.

LYDIA

No names, phones or clocks. I don't understand but as long as I get my reward, so what.

BELLHOP

Except for the Madre De, of course.

LYDIA

I can think of another name for him. How will I know when it's time to wake up without a clock?

BELLHOP

You will awake when you're ready.

LYDIA

Thank you for your help.

The bellhop bows and exits.

Lydia breathes in the spacious room in a dream-like state.

She goes to the dresser where items are laid out in a neat rows, brushes, combs, new cosmetics and a gold hand mirror. She picks it up to inspect it. It has letters on the back.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

L-C? Those are my initials for Lydia Chamber.

A silk robe is folded on the bed. She picks it up.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

My initials are on the robe, too.

She falls back onto the bed and stares at the key. Just then Alex, her cat, jumps up on the bed. She screams and rolls off onto the floor. She pulls herself up to the edge of the bed.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Alex?

She grips him in her arms.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

God, I'm so glad to see you. How did you get here? It doesn't matter. Maybe you can help make some sense out of this place.

She twirls the key in her fingers, caresses Alex and falls back on the bed.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Alex, why am I here?

Lydia releases a deep breath, closes her eyes and drifts asleep. Alex paws at the key.

INT. LYDIA'S SUITE - NIGHT

The sun retreats. Faint stars emerge in the sky. Shadows creep into the room. Lydia awakens with Alex nearby. She rises, turns on the light and puts on the robe.

Lydia goes to the dresser and opens a drawer. It is filled with monogrammed lingerie. She selects slips and bras. She opens another drawer, and inside is a box. Lydia takes it out.

LYDIA

It's like Sara's music box.

She touches it, and the top opens. It plays the same melody she heard before. Inside are diamond and gold jewelry.

She picks up a bracelet, and a necklace, and rings. She is seduced by their beauty. She imitates the Madre De's speech.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

"Everything is complimentary. No exceptions. Leave with what you can carry." That is what he said, Alex.

Alex meows.

INT. LYDIA'S CLOSET - NIGHT

Lydia hums as she runs her hands through the gowns, silk, satin or velvet; which one to wear? She fills her arms with dresses, purses and shoes and stumbles as she leaves the closet.

LATER

Lydia exhibits a new confidence as she stands in front of the mirror. She is statuesque in a midnight blue gown. A look of vanity glimmers in her eyes. She grins at herself in the mirror.

LYDIA

If that horse could see me, now.
This would ring his bell.

Alex meows perched on the dresser. He paws his approval at her.

LYDIA (CONT'D)
If Sara could see me now.

Lydia gets her purse from the bed, and takes one final look in the mirror.

LYDIA (CONT'D)
It's show time, Alex.

She winks at him. Alex meows and follows her to the door as it closes.

INT. MON TRIOMPHE LOBBY - NIGHT

The lobby is filled with men and women in elegant dress. They meander engaged in laughter and talk. Lydia steps out from the hallway to join the crowd.

Several couples notice her. They whisper then move away as she approaches. Lydia attempts to greet other guests but they ignore her, too and walk by.

Lydia looks around the lobby alone and confused. She watches the group stroll through a circular door then follows them.

INT. STARRY NIGHT LOUNGE ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

A passage. A shelter. A mirage. A revelation.

Lydia enters a tunnel. An infinite number of small lights line the curved wall. She is blinded by its radiance. The circular glow resembles a halo as she drifts through and emerges into another world.

CONTINUOUS

The spacious room is spectacular, a revelation of elegance so overwhelming it gratifies her eye, stills her heart, and seduces her soul. A light dawns within Lydia. She embraces a growing feeling of enchantment and temptation.

A gold bar with a crystal countertop commands one side of the room. People crowd around it, and drink and laugh heartily.

Guests sit in lush booths as they talk and eat. The band members, dressed in white tuxedos, croon the audience. Couples whirl on the dance floor.

Lydia is guided to a booth by the host. All staff wear white gloves and black tuxedos. She sinks into a plush booth. The waiter appears and bows.

WAITER

Miss Lydia, welcome. You look divine this evening.

She blushes when she hears her name.

LYDIA

Thank you. I would like to start with Champagne, and make it your very best.

WAITER

I am sorry but I don't know what you mean.

LYDIA

Here we go again. What do you serve here?

WAITER

There is only one drink worthy of Mon Triomphe, a Paradise Cocktail.

LYDIA

What is in it?

WAITER

Paradise.

LYDIA

What does it taste like?

WAITER

Paradise.

LYDIA

Bring me a pitcher.

He bows again and walks off.

She sighs and takes in the full breath of the room. Lydia notices a couple in the next booth, she smiles but they turn away like the others in the lobby.

The waiter reappears. He places an unusual shaped glass on the table. It has a long stem and a rose shaped top. The drink is blue, like the sky in a glass.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

That is fast service. Thank you.

She studies the drink then sniffs it and sips with a look of surprise and delight. She takes a deeper sip.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

It is delicious. I've never tasted anything like it.

WAITER

I am thrilled. Now, what may I bring you for dinner?

She relaxes in the plush seat.

LYDIA

I would like to see a menu, please.

The waiter laughs. He stops another waiter to tell him what she said and they both laugh.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

What did I say now?

WAITER

There are no menus at Mon Triomphe, Miss Lydia. You desire it and you shall have it.

LYDIA

The Madre De told me everything is complimentary, correct?

The waiter nods and smiles.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Then I will have another cocktail and start off with a Caesar Salad, and for the main course a lobster with a T-Bone on the plate to keep it company, then a chocolate souffle for desert. Why aren't you writing my order down?

WAITER

No need, you will have it at once.

He bows. Lydia smiles with a wink. Mere seconds pass when the waiter returns with a cart of food. Her eyes widen as he serves it.

LYDIA

Wait. You are kidding. I ordered it a minute ago. It is impossible to make all of this food so fast.

WAITER

Impossible is what Mon Triomphe is
all about, Miss Lydia.

The waiter places another cocktail in front of her. She gulps the drink then reaches for the next one. Lydia resigns herself to the food, the moment, and the night as she devours it all.

DISSOLVE TO:

The band plays as couples dance. Lydia feels spirited but not drunk. She swipes the last dollop of the souffle from the plate with her finger, and licks her lips like a satisfied child.

The Madre De approaches with a fresh cocktail, and places it on the table.

MADRE DE

Miss Lydia, I'm glad to see you are
finally enjoying your stay with us.

LYDIA

Thank you.

MADRE DE

How are the accommodations in your
suite?

LYDIA

It is beyond belief.

She relaxes her gaze.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry for the way I behaved today.

He holds his hand up to stop her.

MADRE DE

Pleased, I owe you an apology for my
rudeness. After all, you are a guest
at Mon Triomphe. Enjoy yourself and
let me know if you need anything.

He bows with a humble smile and walks off. She takes the drink as she leaves the table.

Lydia walks closer to the bandstand. Just then she is bumped from behind and spills her drink. She steadies herself, and the last of the cocktail spills out of the glass as she turns. Lydia now faces the stranger.

SHANE, 30's, an elegant man with a chiseled physique sways with the grace of a dancer. A smile curls a corner of his mouth, the smile of a man who knows what he wants, and how to get it. His tux drips with drops of paradise.

Lydia tosses her hair back and finds her voice first.

LYDIA

I am so sorry.

SHANE

I am so thrilled. I'm the one who must apologize. I tripped when I came closer to listen to the band.

LYDIA

I'm sure it was my fault, please excuse me.

His eyes soften at her humility.

SHANE

I was drinking paradise now I'm wearing it, and looking at it, too.

LYDIA

Your suit is ruined.

She brushes a few drops off his jacket with trembling fingers.

He motions for a waiter who appears with fresh drinks. Shane hands one to Lydia as he holds up his glass.

SHANE

Legend says to finish it in one drink for good luck.

LYDIA

What legend is that?

He gazes at her with tenderness.

SHANE

The one I just invented. I'm Shane.

He bows. She wets her dry lips.

LYDIA

I am Lydia.

He rises to meet her gaze.

SHANE

Hello, Lydia.

She is enamored.

LYDIA

Good evening, Shane.

SHANE

Let's drink to our good fortune at meeting tonight. Here is hoping we like each other at the end, as much as we do at the beginning.

LYDIA

That is bold for a first toast between strangers.

SHANE

Would you prefer a mundane one?

LYDIA

I am not sure what I prefer anymore.

He traps her gaze in his.

SHANE

Let's not lose the moment to doubt. We must trust that luck will come again.

He raise his glass and she does the same. Shane interlocks his arm with hers. They never take their gaze off each other as they drink from each other's glass.

Both finish their drinks in one gulp. Then with his left-hand, Shane holds the glass by its base. He twirls it back and forth between the fingers of his right hand as he makes his way up turning the glass stem into a flower stem.

Shane reaches the top of the glass, then pulls the top through his right hand in one motion. The glass top turns into a blue rose. He hands it to her.

SHANE (CONT'D)

And so it begins, Lydia.

She takes the rose from him enchanted, excited and scared. Then by the terrace doors, a piano's arpeggio is heard followed by robust applause. They turn to look.

The CONTESSA, 50's rises in regal elegance and waves her arms with a diva's flair to absorb the ovation. She bows in measured movements timed to the next wave of applause. She wears a diamond laced gown which sparkles.

CONTESSA

I must be going.

The crowd groans with protests.

PATRONS

Contessa, more, please more.

They applaud encouragement.

PATRONS (CONT'D)

Bravo, Contessa. More please.

Her hearty voice echoes above their pleas.

CONTESSA

You are too kind. Actually, you're every kind.

She floats through the crowd which parts like the Red Sea. A diminutive ADMIRER, 50'S, follows her like a horny puppy.

ADMIRER

Contessa, you're magnificent. I worship you.

CONTESSA

Worship me from over there with the others.

She waves at a table filled with gorgeous men who blow kisses at her.

CONTESSA (CONT'D)

You have just won the privilege of being rejected by me.

She nudges him aside and makes her way through the crowd accepting praise. A WOMAN, 50'S, approaches her.

WOMAN

Contessa, tell me your secret with men. I have lost both husbands.

She replies with a condescending tone.

CONTESSA

My dear, to lose one husband is tragic, but to lose two is damn careless.

She brushes past the woman and strolls up to Shane and Lydia. The Contessa examines her, head-to-toe then toe-to-head. Shane soothes her ego.

SHANE

I have never heard you play better.

A smile curls a corner of her mouth.

CONTESSA

You are the only one worth playing for, my dear. I see you've already replaced me. I am heartbroken but not jealous.

SHANE

There is no replacement for you, Contessa.

She brushes past him to stand directly in front of Lydia.

CONTESSA

Introduce me to your new obsession.

SHANE

This is the lady from paradise.

CONTESSA

How utterly sinful. You know how much I adore sin.

LYDIA

I am not from paradise.

The Contessa narrows her gaze at Lydia.

CONTESSA

I couldn't agree more but humility is forbidden at Mon Triomphe.

LYDIA

I'm Lydia Chambers from ...

The Contessa interrupts.

CONTESSA

My dear, how one arrives at Mon Triomphe is unimportant. The only topic of interest is with whom will you leave, if anyone.

LYDIA

I'm sorry. I didn't know. It is all so new and overwhelming to me.

CONTESSA

More humility. This will be a long night after all.

She grabs a cocktail from a tray as a waiter walks by.

CONTESSA (CONT'D)

That doesn't mean it has to be a dry one.

The Contessa takes a gulp. Lydia tries to change the subject.

LYDIA

I have never seen a more beautiful room. Don't you think so, Contessa?

She drains the glass.

CONTESSA

Only when I am in it.

She puts the glass on a tray as a waiter walks by. She quickly takes another cocktail.

SHANE

I am sure we're boring you, so we will take a walk in the garden. It is extraordinary at night.

Shane leads Lydia away. She sips and eyes them as they disappear into the garden. The male admirer approaches the Contessa, again.

ADMIRER

An interesting couple don't you think?

CONTESSA

She is ordinary with a hint of stupid.

ADMIRER

Nevertheless, they could be falling in love. Sometimes it happens, just like that.

He snaps his fingers.

CONTESSA

They strike me as the type of a couple who are capable of anything, just like that.

She mocks him by snapping her fingers, too. He leans closer.

CONTESSA (CONT'D)

Why are you still near me?

ADMIRER

I think we are capable of anything,
too; just like that.

He snaps his fingers, again. She walks away but he steps in front of her.

CONTESSA

I am not afraid to hurt you.

ADMIRER

Contessa, the cosmic influences of
the primal fluids come together in
your heated vortex waiting for
unification with me.

He tries to embrace her but she pulls away.

ADMIRER (CONT'D)

I want to make love to you.

CONTESSA

No and stay away from my vortex.

She hurries past but he blows kisses through the air to her.

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT

Lydia walks into the garden and stops, she is speechless.
Shane walks besides her as she takes it in.

It is yet another world, a garden within a garden manicured
and perfect. Pathways are lined with flowers of all colors,
types, and sizes in a stunning array.

Numerous smaller water fountains separate the garden. A
large fountain commands the center spot. She stops beside
it, and glides her hand on the water's surface.

Moonlight reflects from the water and glistens on her face,
intensifying her beauty. Shane can't stop looking at her.

LYDIA

I didn't make a good impression on
her.

SHANE

The Contessa is only impressed with
herself.

LYDIA

Is she a real Contessa?

SHANE
She is as real as you.

LYDIA
And you, too?

SHANE
You decide.

He changes the subject as he walks, and she follows beside him.

SHANE (CONT'D)
Let me show you the garden. It has flowers that normally don't grow together. Cactus with roses and tropical flowers with pine trees. This is a reflecting pool. Here everything exist. Everything is possible.

LYDIA
I have heard that before. I won't be here long enough to enjoy it. I'm checking out after collecting my reward. Since you seem to know everything, maybe you can give me a clue why I am here.

He stops by the reflecting pool.

SHANE
You are here because you want to be.

LYDIA
That is not true. I had no choice.

SHANE
You always have choices, Lydia. You chose to believe in an unknown reward.

Lydia stiffens.

LYDIA
So did you. Besides, you have no idea what I really believe.

Shane glances into the water.

SHANE
Perhaps not but come over here and look.

He points to the pool.

SHANE (CONT'D)

The pool reflects your true self and how you feel. Your reflection reveals sadness.

Lydia stares at her reflection in the water. She is shocked at her grim image while Shane's looks pristine.

SHANE (CONT'D)

Why?

She is silent as he steps to her but she turns away. Then a melody drifts through the air. She listens, a gleam of recognition rises in her eyes. Lydia regains her composure.

LYDIA

I know that music.

SHANE

It is the "Blue Rose Waltz."

LYDIA

I heard it for the first time from Sara's music box.

SHANE

Who?

LYDIA

Sara Evans. She's the one who told me about Mon Triomphe. She met Omar here years ago. He gave the box to her as a gift before she left.

SHANE

Omar?

(beat)

Yes, Omar is still here.

LYDIA

How do you know him?

SHANE

What I know and how is not important.

LYDIA

You have all the answers don't you?

SHANE

You are surrounded by answers.

LYDIA

Just tell me where I can find Omar.

(MORE)

LYDIA (CONT'D)

I must tell him about Sara. What does he look like?

She searches the crowd in the garden.

SHANE

He has the look of someone who is forgotten. You will see many people like that here.

LYDIA

I must speak to him. Will you take me to him?

SHANE

Tomorrow you'll meet Omar but for now instead of asking questions, answer one for me.

Lydia senses a trap.

LYDIA

Yes?

SHANE

Tell me what makes you sad.

LYDIA

You're so consumed with my sadness.

SHANE

Not as much as you.

She is caught off-guard. Lydia looks at her reflection again.

LYDIA

I don't reveal my life to everyone.

Shane's eyes explore her silence.

SHANE

I apologize for offending you. This evening has not started off well. Perhaps we can try again tomorrow. Please excuse me.

He bows and walks away. She is startled and calls after Shane.

LYDIA

Wait, please.

He stops, and turns to her.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

He nods his acceptance.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

I want to ask for a favor I haven't earned yet, and maybe never will.

SHANE

What is it, Lydia?

She walks closer to him.

LYDIA

Will you help me?

SHANE

How?

LYDIA

I don't know. I'm not even certain that I can trust you, but you're the only one who will talk to me.

Shane steps back to her.

SHANE

Dance with me.

LYDIA

What?

SHANE

This is your only first night at Mon Triomphe. It should end with a dance.

LYDIA

What about Omar?

SHANE

He has been here for years. I'm sure he will last until tomorrow. Lydia, you won't answer everything about Mon Triomphe in one night, perhaps ever. So, I advice you enjoy your time here.

LYDIA

I don't dance.

SHANE

I will teach you.

(MORE)

SHANE (CONT'D)

Legend has it that those who dance
the waltz for the first time will be
blessed.

LYDIA

You're just full of legends.

SHANE

You are full of questions. Don't
resist the unfamiliar. Put your
faith in the music.

LYDIA

I should have put my faith in Arthur
Murray instead.

SHANE

Trust me.

He guides her toward the ballroom. Lydia makes excuses.

LYDIA

I'll fall.

SHANE

I'll catch you.

LYDIA

I'll embarrass you.

SHANE

I'll forgive you.

She is shocked but doesn't struggle as he leads her inside.

INT. STARRY NIGHT LOUNGE - CONTINUOUS

Couples fill the dance floor. Shane takes Lydia in his arms.
She gulps as he draws close. They dance slowly as if in
their own world. The other couples notice them, stop and
move aside.

In a corner of the lounge, the Madre De and the Contessa
stand together and watch.

CONTESSA

I detect trouble is brewing.

MADRE DE

I knew it when she first confronted
me. You know how I detest that from
anyone.

CONTESSA
She won't do, will she?

MADRE DE
No. She won't do at all.

CONTESSA
What do you have in mind?

MADRE DE
Everything.

The Contessa and Madre De trade wicked glances.

INT. LYDIA'S SUITE - DAY

The sunrise saturates the room. Alex lies beside her on the pillow. Lydia awakens and beams. She stretches as if tight strings just released her.

Lydia strolls to the window and jerks the drapes open. Light penetrates through her. A new reality is carved out of her like a Henry Moore sculpture. Lydia is beautiful now in a way that is different from her previous beauty.

LYDIA
This is the moment I have waited for
my entire life.

INT. STARRY NIGHT LOUNGE - DAY

Lydia floats through the tunnel transformed. She sinks into a booth and snaps her fingers for the waiter who appears.

LYDIA
The usual.

DISSOLVE TO:

Empty plates and glasses clutter the table. The waiter approaches.

WAITER
Would you like anything else?

LYDIA
Tell the chef my lobster was a bit
overcooked, but he will have a chance
tonight to redeem himself.

Lydia burps as she stands. She walks toward the garden when the Contessa intercepts her.

CONTESSA

My dear, how delicious you look today.
Almost good enough to be eaten.

Lydia gathers her strength.

LYDIA

Contessa, I must warn you that I am
not as nice as you think.

CONTESSA

I hope not.

They trade quick smiles.

CONTESSA (CONT'D)

May I join you?

LYDIA

I would still like to explore it on
my own.

CONTESSA

I insist, my dear.

Before Lydia can reply, the Contessa leads her by the arm
into the garden.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

It is filled with guests who stroll through the garden while
others rest on benches in the shade.

Lydia and the Contessa wander past fountains and rose bushes.

CONTESSA

I don't know.

LYDIA

Excuse me?

CONTESSA

I sense you want to ask if I know
what your reward is. I don't know
but be careful what you wish for
even if you deserve it.

Lydia stops and guides her aside.

LYDIA

You made it obvious last night you
don't like me.

CONTESSA

My dear, that is my approach with everyone new at Mon Triomphe. It separates the weak from the rest of the herd. The fact that you give as good as you take is mildly impressive.

Lydia senses an opportunity.

LYDIA

Can I tell you the truth?

CONTESSA

Everyone does, eventually.

LYDIA

It seems too perfect here. Maybe it is a dream or a nightmare, or both. I woke up this morning feeling wonderful but I'm still scared.

CONTESSA

Then leave, Lydia. Take whatever you can carry from the suite as your reward and leave Mon Triomphe.

LYDIA

I thought of that but I can't.

CONTESSA

We didn't think you could.

LYDIA

We?

The Contessa realizes her slip then corrects herself.

CONTESSA

I didn't think you could.

LYDIA

I don't know why I am telling you. I shouldn't burden you with my fears. You don't seem to have any.

The Contessa's expression relaxes.

CONTESSA

I do.

LYDIA

Really?

The Contessa studies her before she answers.

CONTESSA

All in good time, my dear.

LYDIA

Perhaps we are more alike than we realize.

CONTESSA

God help us.

LYDIA

In spite of all the beauty, there is still something sinister here.

The Madre De walks up and bows to them.

MADRE DE

Good morning, ladies.

CONTESSA

We were just speaking of you.

MADRE DE

I'm flattered. Miss Lydia, how do you like Mon Triomphe?

LYDIA

Parts of it I adore, but there is a sense of dread.

His mood darkens.

MADRE DE

Another complaint.

The Contessa tries to rescue her.

CONTESSA

Lydia, I recommend you visit the chapel behind the main garden. It is even more spectacular than me.

LYDIA

Maybe a prayer will defend against any evil.

The Contessa raises an eyebrow. He stiffens as Lydia walks past him.

MADRE DE

She is more trouble than I expected.

He walks off. The Contessa watches Lydia disappear behind a line of trees.

CONTESSA

You give as good as you take,
impressive but dangerous.

She turns to leave and meets Shane who walks out of the lounge.

SHANE

Good morning. I was hoping Lydia would be here.

CONTESSA

I have not seen her today.

SHANE

I stopped at her suite but she was gone.

CONTESSA

Perhaps she has left forever.

SHANE

I doubt it.

CONTESSA

You know she is out of favor with the Madre De.

SHANE

I'm not surprised.

CONTESSA

Let her collect the reward then leave.

SHANE

I can't do that.

CONTESSA

She made the unfortunate mistake of taking you seriously. She is not like us and never will be.

SHANE

That is what I am counting on.

Shane walks past the Contessa into the garden.

EXT. CHAPEL - DAY

Lydia walks up the path behind the garden. The trail leads to a clearing lined by two rows of tall pine trees. She stops and looks around confused.

LYDIA

Where is the chapel?

The rows of trees bend toward the center over the clearing as the tops intertwine to form a chapel's steeple. Lydia drinks in its simple beauty. She walks inside.

After several seconds, she hears footsteps rustle through the grass and hides in the bushes. A shadow appears at the chapel's entrance.

The figure advances and reaches the front then stops and kneels.

SHANE

I was taught to always take but never to give. I have obeyed but not anymore. I have never needed anyone to need me until now.

Lydia sneaks out from behind the bushes. Shane hears the leaves crackle. He glances up.

She walks back several yards and waits. Then she strolls up the path as if for the first time. Lydia sees Shane and fakes surprise. He turns to greet her.

LYDIA

Shane, you're here, too. I'm sorry to interrupt. The Contessa told me about the chapel. I came to see it.

She looks around.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

It is so beautiful, don't you think?

SHANE

Only when I'm in it.

LYDIA

Did you come here to pray?

SHANE

I come here for the shade.

LYDIA

It is a sin to lie.

SHANE

It is a bigger sin to spy.

LYDIA

You never told me how you know so much about Mon Triomphe.

SHANE

The past isn't important.

LYDIA

Yes, it is.

(beat)

Shane, last night I was reminded of something that I don't like to remember.

He is surprised by her sudden openness.

SHANE

Everyone has those types of memories.

LYDIA

It is not that easy for me. This is the worst memory I have known.

Shane looks at her then steps closer. She freezes.

SHANE

Then let that memory pass. Think of now. Allow this moment to happen.

The silence is powerful, and filled with the first pulse of desire.

LYDIA

I don't know if I can do that.

SHANE

I'll show you.

He takes her face in his hands in the way a woman wants. Shane kisses her with such softness she has no time to respond. She lets it happen.

SHANE (CONT'D)

This is the perfect place to confess. Lydia, I didn't bump into you by accident last night.

The smile disappears from his lips.

SHANE (CONT'D)

The Madre De warned the other guests to avoid you or risk losing their rewards.

(MORE)

SHANE (CONT'D)

That is why no one else will speak
with you.

(beat)

Lydia, he poisoned the drink he served
you. Don't ask me how I know but
it's true.

She steps back in shock.

LYDIA

My God, what kind of monster is he?

SHANE

He punished you for questioning his
authority, especially in front of
others. You forced the Madre De to
prove himself and Mon Triomphe to
you.

LYDIA

He wanted to kill me for asking
questions? I can't accept something
like all of this which appears
instantly before me. Mon Triomphe
still doesn't make sense, but it's
not a reason to kill me.

SHANE

Lydia, he didn't and he won't. I
promise you.

LYDIA

Wait. That means you saved my life.

SHANE

My pleasure.

A deeper sense takes a hold of Lydia as she studies him.

LYDIA

Why did you do that, Shane? I'm a
stranger to you.

SHANE

Good manners, perhaps.

LYDIA

You risk your reward, maybe even
your life for me. There must be
another reason.

SHANE

There are many reasons but this is not the time for more questions. Be careful of the Madre De.

LYDIA

Perhaps I should take the diamond jewelry, and a couple of lobsters and just leave.

SHANE

An understandable reaction but a disappointing one from you.

LYDIA

What would you do in my place?

SHANE

Stay.

(beat)

Like you, I don't reveal my life easily to anyone either. I will only say that I feel different because of you.

LYDIA

It is not me but this place.

SHANE

How I feel doesn't have anything to do with Mon Triomphe.

She pulls away from him.

LYDIA

All of this has happened too fast. This can't be my life.

SHANE

Let me guess what your life was like before, dull, predictable and lonely.

LYDIA

Why are you doing this to me?

SHANE

Because you let me.

LYDIA

I feel like I'm exploding.

SHANE

You can't keep it inside forever.

Just then the Contessa walks up to interrupt.

CONTESSA

There you are, you naughty darlings.
I have been looking for you both.

Lydia and Shane trade exasperated glances.

SHANE

Do you have bad news about someone
you are eager to share?

CONTESSA

Not yet.

LYDIA

We were enjoying the beauty of the
chapel.

She looks up.

CONTESSA

Lovely but useless.

LYDIA

Contessa, does that mean you don't
believe in God?

CONTESSA

My dear, if God exists he has a lot
of explaining to do.

SHANE

Why do you want to see us?

CONTESSA

I thought you two might elope. I so
want to catch the bouquet.

LYDIA

We're sorry to disappoint you.

CONTESSA

I am not disappointed in the least.
Now that I see all is well, I'll be
on my way. Good-bye my dears.

She walks out of sight.

LYDIA

Does she ever listen to anyone?

SHANE

Not so far.

He collects himself.

SHANE (CONT'D)

Now, we are finally alone.

They look around to make certain. Shane kisses her suddenly but this time she doesn't hesitate.

Then the Madre De appears at the chapel's entrance. His eyes narrow as he walks up to them. They stop kissing. Lydia's gaze freezes on him.

MADRE DE

Good morning, again. Miss Lydia, I see you are exploring Mon Triomphe. How wonderful. You will find many astounding things here. However, I feel it's my duty to caution you not to wander off too far. Amidst this beauty there are a few undeveloped areas which might be unsafe.

LYDIA

Is that a threat?

Shane nudges her. She regains her composure.

MADRE DE

Certainly not.

Shane puts his hands on her shoulders.

SHANE

I will make certain Lydia is safe.

MADRE DE

I see.

SHANE

What brings you back here anyway?

MADRE DE

The shade.

Instantly the trees unfurl the steeple's shape, and resume their normal appearance. The shade is gone. They all look up then Shane and Lydia glance at the Madre De. He turns his eyes away from the sun's intense glare. He walks away then stops.

MADRE DE (CONT'D)

Miss Lydia, please let me know if you have any more complaints about
(MORE)

MADRE DE (CONT'D)
 your stay. I don't want you to leave
 Mon Triomphe unhappy.

LYDIA
 I promise.

MADRE DE
 So, do I.

He walks out of sight. The trees resume the chapel's steeple as they stand under its shade.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

The room is stately and huge, several stories high with circular staircases to each level. Books line every shelf. The bottom floor has a wall with a bay window partly covered with sheer curtains.

A fire crackles in the fireplace. It gives the warm much needed warmth. Two leather chairs face it. Sofas and chairs, and tables decorate the room.

The door opens as Lydia steps inside. Her eyes adjust to the firelight and searches the space. It appears empty.

LYDIA
 Omar?

Lydia is surprised to hear her echo throughout the room. She speaks softer.

LYDIA (CONT'D)
 Omar?

A man's cough breaks the silence. It echoes then he finally speaks.

OMAR
 Yes?

She steps farther inside but still can't see him.

LYDIA
 I am a friend of Sara Evans. Do you
 remember her?

OMAR
 Sara?

His voice echoes louder. A man stands up from one of the leather chairs. He answers as he turns and coughs again.

OMAR (CONT'D)

Yes, of course. Sara.

OMAR, 40's, but looks older, wears a dark suit which his thin frame no longer fills; it hangs on him. A plain white shirt is open at his collar. A short beard hides his hollow cheeks. He appears as Shane described, a man with the look of someone who is forgotten.

He looks around the room until he sees Lydia. He walks to her.

OMAR (CONT'D)

Where is Sara?

LYDIA

She is not here.

OMAR

Who are you?

LYDIA

I am Lydia. Sara told me about you. I'm shocked to still find you here since she met you years ago.

OMAR

Time has lost its importance for me. What do you want?

LYDIA

I need to tell you the truth about Sara. I met her when I found the key. She told me about Mon Triomphe.

OMAR

Please come and sit.

He points to the chairs. They sit in front of the fire.

OMAR (CONT'D)

What did she tell you?

LYDIA

It wasn't Sara's fault that she didn't return. When she went home, her father got angry with her.

Lydia glances at the fire then at Omar.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

He wouldn't let her return because he didn't believe her story.

OMAR

What kind of father denies his child happiness?

LYDIA

A cruel one but that never changed how much she loves you even now.

OMAR

She said that to you?

LYDIA

Only yesterday. She tried so hard to return, Omar.

He coughs and wipes his mouth with a handkerchief.

OMAR

There was much she never knew about me. I didn't have time to tell her that I was escaping from something in my life. I planned to tell her everything when she returned.

LYDIA

Can you tell me what you are hiding from?

He stands and walks closer to the fireplace, and looks into the flames lost in a memory. Both are so engaged in their conversation that they don't notice a shadow appears outside the window.

OMAR

Promise you will never repeat this to anyone.

Lydia nods yes.

OMAR (CONT'D)

I killed someone. How and why is not important now. I ended a life. Then I found a key like others. I eventually made my way from Paris to here. I met Sara and hoped I could restart my life with her. I was going to tell her about my past, but when she didn't return I took that as my punishment. So, I've spent my life in this magnificent prison.

LYDIA

Omar, why didn't you leave and try to find her?

OMAR

I was afraid she changed her mind about me. I couldn't bear the thought of her rejection. I must look like a coward in your eyes.

LYDIA

I only see a man who has suffered as much as the woman he loves.

OMAR

Be warned if you don't leave when you have the chance, then you are trapped here until someone comes for you.

Lydia rises.

LYDIA

What if no one does come for you?

OMAR

As I said, it is a magnificent prison.

LYDIA

Isn't there some way for you to leave?

OMAR

I have heard the Madre De can grant an exception, but it comes at an extraordinary price.

LYDIA

What is it?

OMAR

I only know that something of great value must be left behind at Mon Triomphe.

LYDIA

I'll try to help you.

OMAR

Lydia, you don't understand. Sara is the one who would have to make the sacrifice in order for me to gain my freedom.

LYDIA

I know she would do anything for you to leave here.

OMAR

I won't let her do it for me, whatever
the price.

He coughs several times and leans against a chair.

LYDIA

Omar, you are ill.

OMAR

It is best that we not meet again.
If you see Sara, please don't tell
her you found me. Let her have her
illusion the way she remembers me.
That is all either of us has left
now.

He walks to the door.

OMAR (CONT'D)

I wish you a kinder fate with your
reward then what Sara and I have
known.

Omar walks out. The air leaves her body as Lydia slumps
into a chair then collapses her head into her hands.

The shadows steps closer to the window. The Madre De is
visible now. A smile appears at the corner of his mouth.

INT. MON TRIOMPHE HALLWAY - DAY

The elevator door opens and out strides the Madre De. He
walks down the corridor to stand before two huge doors.
They open as he walks in, and close behind him.

INT. CONTESSA'S SUITE - CONTINUOUS

The suite is the most lavish one at Mon Triomphe. The Madre
De strolls in.

A splendid huge gold chair faces the terrace. The door is
open and a breeze blows through the room. Only a hand is
visible as it rest on the chair's arm holding a cocktail.

CONTESSA

Is it time?

MADRE DE

Yes.

The Contessa rises and finishes her drink, then puts it on a table.

CONTESSA

How is she?

MADRE DE

Desperate, confused, and lonely.

The Contessa walks to him.

CONTESSA

Perfect. I won't let you down.

MADRE DE

You never do.

She walks past him.

CONTESSA

However, it is a pity when you think of poor Lydia.

MADRE DE

Why? I thought you agreed with me on what needs to be done about her.

CONTESSA

So did I.

MADRE DE

Now, you change your mind?

CONTESSA

It is a woman's prerogative, my dear.

MADRE DE

I can't do this without you.

CONTESSA

She reminds me of myself, once. Naive, kind and loving. Do you remember?

MADRE DE

No.

CONTESSA

That was before you were the Madre De, and I was abandoned by my lover.

MADRE DE

I needed someone I could trust to help me with Mon Triomphe after I inherited it.

CONTESSA

Stole it from your brother is more accurate. Your father left it all to him.

MADRE DE

My brother abandoned you and Mon Triomphe because he was afraid to rule it the way it should be. He was ashamed to be his father's son but I wasn't.

CONTESSA

That is the story you have always told me.

MADRE DE

It serves no purpose to bring up the past. Darling, look at what we have gotten in return. Everything.

CONTESSA

Yes, of course. I had a momentary lapse of indecency. Forgive me.

MADRE DE

I always do.

She kisses him. He pulls her to the bed.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Twilight approaches. Lydia sits on a bench under a large tree holding Alex.

LYDIA

I don't know what to do, Alex. I can leave with the jewels or stay to get my reward. I wish you could reply like the horses.

Alex jumps from Lydia's arms and runs off. She calls for him.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Alex, stop. Come here. Stop.

She chases after him past the chapel to the end of the garden.

The difference is striking from the manicured grounds to the unkempt terrain. She slows as she approaches a stone wall. She sees Alex in front of a small gate concealed with ivy.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Come here.

Lydia runs to him, but Alex disappears inside. She peeks through the vines.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Alex. Alex.

Lydia struggles to enter but the gate is narrow. She hesitates then turns sideways to squeeze through.

EXT. SMALLER GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

It is a smaller over-grown garden. The fading sun barely shines through the thick tree branches.

Lydia has just enough sunlight to see her way. She hears Alex meow. She follows him deeper inside.

Alex stops in front of a petite tree. Lydia finds him and picks him up.

LYDIA

I thought I would never find you.
Where are we?

Lydia stands in front of a tree covered in white. It sways gently. A few butterflies fly off because the tree is covered with white butterflies. The translucent brightness of their wings lighten the area. It is a glow, a radiance beyond belief.

She reaches out to touch it, but the butterflies fly away. Hundreds of them encircle her. She is shocked but thrilled. Lydia feels their wings on her face as they float around her. They fly away all at once to reveal ...

EYES.

Human eyes hang on the tree's branches.

No faces just eyes. It is a bizarre, shocking yet splendid sight. Half-disgusted but awed, she stares at them. The tree of eyes return her startled gaze.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

My God, what are you?

She gathers her courage to approach. The eyes follow her.

Lydia drops Alex and walks slowly around the tree. He brushes against it causing a pair to fall off. It lands at her feet. She bends down to the eyes. She notices tears as they look at her.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

What has he done to you?

Lydia backs up and stumbles as she runs toward the gate. She trips and cries. She reaches the narrow opening and squeeze's through but her arm gets caught. Alex runs through beneath her legs.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

God, help me.

Lydia pulls until she rips her arm through the gate torn and bloody. She grabs Alex and runs past the chapel through the garden back to Mon Triomphe.

EXT. MON TRIOMPHE - CONTINUOUS

Lydia enters the lush garden by the large fountain. She wipes her tears and turns away from couples as they pass.

The Contessa rests in the shade of a tree. Its branches bend to almost form a shroud. She sees Lydia then calls to her. Lydia turns away as she tries to calm down. She regains some composure and forces a smile.

CONTESSA

Lydia, I see you've been naughty,
again. How delicious. I have been
waiting for you.

Lydia turns to her.

LYDIA

I tore my sleeve on a tree branch.

The Contessa approaches and glances at her arm.

CONTESSA

It must have been a fierce one to
cut you so deeply. Come over here
with me.

She guides Lydia to the large fountain. They sit on its edge as the Contessa dips her handkerchief in the water, and wipes away the blood.

CONTESSA (CONT'D)

What were you doing beyond the garden anyway?

Lydia winces at the sting.

LYDIA

Alex, my cat, ran away so I chased him.

CONTESSA

What did you find besides Alex?

LYDIA

Nothing.

The Contessa grips her arm.

CONTESSA

Lydia, what did you find?

She realizes she has been caught lying.

LYDIA

I don't know how to describe it.

CONTESSA

Try.

LYDIA

I came upon a shabby wooded area hidden behind a stone fence. Alex ran inside so I squeezed my way through a gate after him. I could barely see but there was a glow. I followed it to a small tree filled with white butterflies. Hundreds of them surrounded me. Then they flew away to reveal eyes dangling on tree branches. As unbelievable as it sounds it was a tree of eyes. No faces just the eyes, and they were crying, too. It was horrible.

She finishes wiping the cut.

CONTESSA

You have compassion for lost souls. That means you are one.

LYDIA

Where did they come from? Who did that to them and why?

CONTESSA

You must forget what you saw. Tell no one.

LYDIA

I will never forget a sight like that.

Her voice deepens to a stern tone.

CONTESSA

Lydia, I said forget it and tell no one.

Lydia looks at her and nods her agreement.

CONTESSA (CONT'D)

Good. Now, will you stay or leave tomorrow?

LYDIA

I don't know.

CONTESSA

Then I will tell you. You will take the jewels from your suite, kiss Shane passionately and leave satisfied you have received your reward. Eventually, all of Mon Triomphe will fade from your memory.

LYDIA

Including you?

CONTESSA

I am unforgettable, my dear.

LYDIA

So is Shane. I love him.

CONTESSA

You would be a fool not to, but one worthy of love is rarely happy with it. Love disappoints so easily. You will be much happier with the gold.

LYDIA

You make love sound cheap and useless.

CONTESSA

Now, you understand.

LYDIA

It is not that way for Sara and Omar. Their love is what I want to know in my life. They haven't been together for years yet, they didn't fade from each other's memory. Even if they never see each other again, they will stay in love. Gold can't compare to that. If you were ever in love Contessa, you would understand.

The Contessa is caught off guard.

CONTESSA

Yes, if I had ever been in love.

LYDIA

Besides, I have an idea on how to reunite them.

CONTESSA

I was afraid of that.

LYDIA

Omar told me the Madre De can grant an exception for someone.

The Contessa senses a trap.

CONTESSA

Who?

LYDIA

Me.

The Contessa stands, and her tone turns desperate.

CONTESSA

Lydia, I beg you to reconsider.

LYDIA

Something followed me here. Something I must leave behind when I go. I need to feel my life while I'm still in it.

CONTESSA

By martyring yourself?

LYDIA

That is not what I am doing.

CONTESSA

Of course it is, my dear. You're always reaching for something even when you don't know what you are trying to grasp.

LYDIA

You don't understand.

CONTESSA

In that case, I am grateful for my ignorance. Now, I must leave before your decency corrupts me.

(to herself)

Too late.

The Contessa walks away. Alex jumps up on the fountain's edge and climbs onto her lap. She pets him then examines her cut. It is completely healed. No scar is visible.

INT - LYDIA'S SUITE - NIGHT

Lydia and Shane lounge on her terrace balcony. Stars fill the sky. She smacks her lips as she finishes a lobster's tail and tosses it on a plate.

SHANE

That makes three.

LYDIA

I worked up an appetite today.

SHANE

Doing what?

LYDIA

Thinking.

SHANE

You know that is forbidden here.

LYDIA

I still recommend it.

SHANE

Then I'll try it someday.

He leans in closer.

SHANE (CONT'D)

Enough with wasting time because there is so little of it left.

(MORE)

SHANE (CONT'D)

Lydia, the moment I have waited for
came without warning.

LYDIA

I felt the same way today, too.

SHANE

I love you in ways I may never
understand.

LYDIA

We barely met yet all at once you
love me. It doesn't work that way.

He points at the sky.

SHANE

What do you see?

LYDIA

I don't know.

SHANE

Look deeper.

LYDIA

Just stars and planets.

SHANE

And souls, Lydia. They belong to
the departed. Some are pieces of
souls who watch us searching for the
rest of themselves. When they find
what is missing, they take us to
them. Do you believe me?

LYDIA

I am trying, Shane.

SHANE

You asked about my past. I will
only tell you once there was a boy
who believed in the magical and
mysterious but as he grew he was
distracted by things outside himself.
He lusted for many things of no
importance, so his light got dimmer
until he was dark inside. That child
became my father. Now, because of
you I do what I thought I never could,
I fight that part of him in me so I
don't grow dark, too.

(MORE)

SHANE (CONT'D)

You say I can't love you all at once
because it is not how love works,
but that is exactly how love works.
All at once.

Lydia wanders inside the suite. Shane follows and draws her to him.

LYDIA

The way you say it makes me want to
believe you, but I'm tired of
believing.

SHANE

You would have left by now if that
were true. I'm tired of living in
exile; on the outskirts of my life.
I know you feel the same. That is
why you stayed in spite of the danger.

LYDIA

I stayed for another reason.

SHANE

Me?

Lydia doesn't answer.

SHANE (CONT'D)

You wanted to know why I saved you
before we even met. Lydia, you can
only desire something that you have
already known in your life. When
you fall in love, you are reliving
what happened before. I wasn't going
to lose you again.

The reality begins to crush her.

LYDIA

Tear me apart, and put me back
together.

He pleads in a way he has never done before.

SHANE

Say you love me.

LYDIA

I love you.

SHANE

Tell me again.

LYDIA

I love you. I wish I didn't. It would be easier for both of us. Forgive me.

Shane and Lydia make love as moonlight pours through the window and pools on the floor. They drown in it.

INT. MON TRIOMPHE LOBBY - DAY

Lydia hurries to the reception desk. She speaks to the clerk who points to the lounge.

INT - STARRY NIGHT TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

The Madre De walks through the lighted tunnel. Lydia runs up behind him.

LYDIA

Wait. I have to speak with you.

He stops.

MADRE DE

Yes?

They are surrounded by the brilliant circular glow.

LYDIA

I must know how Sara can be reunited with Omar.

MADRE DE

She left years ago and never returned for Omar. It is obvious she didn't want him.

LYDIA

There must be a way. I know you have the power to grant an exception.

MADRE DE

Are you questioning me, again?

She stands still as his shadow engulfs her. Her translucent skin tightens on her face to reveal quivering blood vessels. Then Lydia sighs and stiffens as she faces him.

LYDIA

Omar is dying.

MADRE DE
An eye for an eye.

LYDIA
Have mercy on him.

MADRE DE
No.

LYDIA
Why do you punish us?

MADRE DE
Because I can.

LYDIA
We are not to blame.

MADRE DE
You are to me.

He turns away from her. She follows him.

LYDIA
Tell me how to help Omar return to
Sara. Please.

MADRE DE
No.

LYDIA
Tell me.

MADRE DE
It is no one's place to order me,
especially you.

He turns to walk away.

LYDIA
I will do whatever it takes to reunite
them.

He stops then steps back to her.

MADRE DE
Why do you care so much about them?

LYDIA
Because you don't want me to.

MADRE DE
You don't have what it takes to help
them, Lydia.

LYDIA

Yes, I do. You just put it there.

He takes a step toward her just as Lydia takes one toward him.

MADRE DE

You defy me because you are arrogant.

LYDIA

I defy you because you are evil.

The remaining white around his eyes disappears.

MADRE DE

You have no idea.

LYDIA

You don't deserve my fear.

MADRE DE

Then I will earn it.

(beat)

You said you would do whatever it takes to reunite them.

Lydia nods her head in agreement.

MADRE DE (CONT'D)

I will give you a last chance to change your mind. I understand it is a woman's prerogative.

Lydia shakes her head no.

MADRE DE (CONT'D)

What about Shane?

Lydia freezes.

LYDIA

I love him in ways I don't understand.

MADRE DE

Then it is not love.

LYDIA

It has to be because it is the opposite of what I feel for you. I'll love Shane even if I never see him again.

His eyes narrow into a sinister glare. Then a smile appears at the corner of his mouth.

MADRE DE

Is this your final decision?

Lydia pauses then nods yes. His smile broadens.

MADRE DE (CONT'D)

I will grant the exception you wish,
Miss Lydia. Now, I will tell you
what you must do.

He leans down to her and whispers. Her eyes widen as he speaks.

EXT. ABANDONED FIELD - DAY

Lydia blinks her eyes open and focuses on the familiar horizon as she stands in the meadow. The horses graze unconcerned. They look up at her.

LYDIA

Did you miss me?

The horses nod yes.

EXT. SARA'S COTTAGE - DAY

Lydia's car screeches to a halt in front of Sara's cottage. She jumps out and races to the door and pounds on it.

LYDIA

Sara, it's me. I'm back. I must
talk to you.

Her fist bangs the door open.

INT. SARA'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

She runs inside the dark house. Sheets cover the furniture.

LYDIA

Sara? Sara?

Lydia runs through the rooms.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Omar is waiting for you. We must
return before twilight.

She returns to the living room and sees a reflection in the fireplace. She picks it up. It is the charred photo of Sara's father.

LYDIA (CONT'D)
Sara, where are you?

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Lydia's car races into town. She parks in front of the post office ... jumps out ... runs to the door ... it is locked. She knocks on the glass then sees a sign in the window.

LYDIA
"Out for Delivery."

She bangs her head on the glass.

A BOY, 10, rides up on his bicycle and stops by the curb. He watches Lydia.

BOY
What's wrong?

Lydia looks up to see him. She looks around but no one else is near.

LYDIA
I can't find my friend. I think she moved away. I thought the mailman would have her new address. I must tell her something important. I will wait a few minutes for him.

BOY
Did you try the train station?

LYDIA
What station?

He points in the direction behind her.

BOY
After you pass the water tower, take the road on the left.

LYDIA
Where does the train go?

He points again with urgency.

BOY

I said it's that way. It only comes once a week. Today is the day for it.

LYDIA

I don't have time to run all over town. I need to be sure where she went.

The boy grows anxious.

BOY

You should go now.

LYDIA

I'll wait a few more minutes for the postman to return.

He shouts at her.

BOY

Lydia, hurry.

Lydia stops at the mention of her name.

LYDIA

What did you say?

BOY

Hurry or you will miss Sara.

She approaches him.

LYDIA

How do you know my name? Who are you?

He pushes his bike from the curb, and peddles into the street then looks over his shoulder at her.

BOY

Twilight is coming, my dear.

Shocked, she follows him into the street as he peddles away. Lydia stands in the road as he disappears around a corner.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

A small, sun-faded wooden station sits by a single set of railroad tracks. A cloud of dust flies by as the sound of a car screeches to a stop beside it.

A train whistle is heard as it pulls away from the station. Lydia races after the train onto the tracks shouting. The whistle drowns out her cries.

LYDIA

Stop the train, stop it. Sara, Sara.

The train trudges up the track. Lydia catches up to the caboose and grabs the handle. She pulls herself up to stand on the bottom step.

The cab door opens and out steps the Madre De. A smile curls one corner of his mouth. She steps up to the next step then sees him. Shock and fear fills her eyes. The train gains speed.

MADRE DE

Miss Lydia, welcome aboard.

LYDIA

How did you get here? Where's Sara?

She tries to get past him but he grabs her.

MADRE DE

I believe this is your stop. Let me help you off.

Lydia tries to fight her way around him, but he pushes her off the train.

She hits the ground and rolls in the gravel to a stop. She stares at him smile as the train fades in the distance. Lydia shouts between cries.

LYDIA

No. No. Sara, Sara.

Lydia buries her head in the dust sobbing.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

The sun moves closer to the horizon. Covered in dust and tears, Lydia stumbles back to her car and falls against it. A human shadow crawls its way up the car to cover her.

SARA

Forgive me.

Lydia is startled at the sound of the voice. She turns to face it.

LYDIA

Sara, thank God. I thought you were on the train.

Lydia collapses into her arms.

SARA

I was seated by a window when a boy on a bicycle rode by. He shouted I must get off and wait for you here.

LYDIA

He told me I would find you at the station, too.

Sara brushes dust off Lydia.

SARA

How did he know either you or me?

LYDIA

Think of him as a kind friend. Now, we must hurry.

SARA

What happened to you?

LYDIA

Do you remember the Madre De?

A light goes on in Sara's eyes.

SARA

Oh, him. I remember.

LYDIA

He was on the train, and pushed me off when I tried to find you.

SARA

As I said, you have no idea what sees and touches you, including evil.

LYDIA

How could evil exist in a place so beautiful?

SARA

It is the perfect place for it, surrounded by beauty to fool you.

LYDIA

Sara, Mon Triomphe is exactly as you described. It is like dreaming with my eyes wide open. I'm sorry I doubted you.

SARA

You were right to question me.

LYDIA

You said to forgive you, but you've done nothing wrong.

SARA

I let fear rule my life. I disappointed Omar and you.

LYDIA

He is still there waiting for you.

SARA

That is impossible. He would have left years ago with someone else.

LYDIA

He knows why you could not return. I have come to take you to him.

She turns quickly and walks away. Lydia follows her.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

This is your last chance. If you don't come now, you will punish yourself worse than your father ever did.

Sara stops.

SARA

Why do you care so much about my happiness instead of your own? There must be someone waiting for you?

LYDIA

Yes.

SARA

Then go back to him. It is your time now.

LYDIA

We can both return.

SARA

How?

EXT. ABANDONED FIELD - NIGHT

Twilight approaches.

Lydia and Sarah hold hands and walks into the field. The horses stop grazing and watch. The birds also fall silent and watch.

Lydia pulls the key out of her pocket. Sara jerks her hand away and steps back.

LYDIA

What are you doing?

SARA

It is too late for me to return.

LYDIA

Omar is waiting for you.

Sara turns away.

SARA

I can't.

Lydia follows her and grabs Sara's arm.

LYDIA

He loves you, Sara.

SARA

I'm afraid.

LYDIA

Why?

SARA

I don't deserve him.

LYDIA

He has waited so long for you.

SARA

I can't expect him to forgive me for wasting his life.

Lydia scans the horizon. The sun is closer to it.

LYDIA

You don't need Omar's forgiveness.
Sara, you need your own.

SARA

I tried to go back once before. It
didn't work. Why will it work now?

LYDIA

Trust me.

SARA

It has been too long. I have
forgotten how to love.

LYDIA

The time for both of you to be afraid
is over. Your father can't stop you
now. You must return because I can't.

Lydia hands the key to Sara then steps away.

SARA

What? You told me we could both
return.

LYDIA

I made an arrangement with the Madre
De to trade my place for you. Then
he tried to stop me from finding
you, so neither of us could return.

SARA

I won't go. It is not fair to you.
You must think of your own life.
You can't give this up for me.

Sara drops the key and darts away. The horses perk up their
heads, and trot in front to stop Sara. Lydia retrieves the
key, and goes to her.

LYDIA

Don't under-estimate my friends.
Thanks, fellas.

The horses nod their approval and stroll off.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Sara, I never would have known about
Mon Triomphe without you.

SARA

What about your reward? How can you
give it up so easily?

LYDIA

It is not easy but necessary. I've known more love and forgiveness in these few days than in my life. Maybe I will get another chance someday. I'll live with that hope.

SARA

But if another chance never comes?

LYDIA

Then I had this one. Between my ambitions and limitations, I have made peace with myself.

Lydia hugs Sara.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

You must go, hurry.

Lydia turns Sara toward the horizon then steps away. Sara glances back at her.

Sara faces the horizon. She collects herself in awe of the sight. Sara sighs and wets her dry lips.

SARA

I believe. I believe, again.

The breeze grows in strength.

SARA (CONT'D)

I do believe.

The tree limbs and grass bow as the wind increases. Lydia braces herself. The horses stand against the gust.

SARA (CONT'D)

I believe.

The wind sweeps across the field forcing Lydia and Sara to close their eyes. The wind subsides.

Mon Triomphe stands before them. Sara gasps and looks at Lydia. Sara inches toward the massive doors. They open as she approaches. She turns for a final look at Lydia. The horses nod their approval. Sara disappears inside.

The doors close. The image fades. Twilight descends.

INT. MON TRIOMPHE LOBBY - NIGHT

Sara stands at the top of the grand staircase. She looks down at the crowded lobby to survey the room.

In front of the reception desk stands the Madre De like an aged guard. He tries to hide his surprise as he traps her gaze in his.

Sara descends. She walks across the floor to face him. He stiffens.

MADRE DE

It has been a very long time, Miss Sara. Welcome back.

He bows to her, and rises with a smug smile. She glares at him then slaps his face. Everyone in the lobby gasps. Absolute shock fills his eyes.

SARA

That is for Lydia. Now, where is Omar?

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT

Omar stands alone in the garden. Couples walk by arm-in-arm. He watches them disappear among the flowers.

He walks to the pool to look at his reflection. His image looks old and sickly. He holds a blue rose. Petal by petal he drops one in the water.

Suddenly Sara's reflection appears on the water next to his. Her image is radiant, she glows. Omar freezes as he recognizes her. He drops the rose in the water. He is speechless. She finds the strength to speak first.

SARA

Omar, please try to forgive me.

He holds up his hand to silence her. He doesn't turn around, but speaks to her reflection instead.

OMAR

Let me look at you, Sara.

He stares at her reflection for several more seconds.

OMAR (CONT'D)

You don't owe me an apology.

SARA

Then I owe one to myself.

OMAR

That is between you and God.

She steps beside him, and turns him to her.

SARA

I let fear keep me from you. I made excuses for years that it was my father's fault, but he was only a man. Not a god or the devil, just a man.

Omar pulls Sara closer.

OMAR

Enough, Sara. Stop grieving the past. Don't wait because eternity will come and go and you will still be waiting.

SARA

Not anymore.

The fountain sprays water skyward. It soaks them. They kiss with luscious fat drops of water on their tongues.

EXT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

The sky is jeweled with infant stars and drenched with threads of mist. It is a delicate almost holy sight.

Sara and Omar approach as the trees bend to form the chapel's steeple. They walk to the front. Shane follows them and hides among the trees.

OMAR

Sara, I will earn every moment with you until the last one. I don't want to just love you. I want to deserve you.

She hushes him as he breaks down.

SARA

I will never love you with fear. I won't let anything rule my life but my love for you.

Shane watches then walks away unseen through the trees.

INT. MON TRIOMPHE LOBBY - NIGHT

Shane walks in and sees the Madre De as he strolls through the lobby. Several couples walk out. Only Shane and the Madre De remain now. Shane calls after him.

SHANE

Wait.

The Madre De ignores him.

SHANE (CONT'D)

I said wait.

He stops and faces Shane.

MADRE DE

Yes?

SHANE

Why did Sara return but not Lydia?

MADRE DE

That is none of your concern.

He walks away in a huff. Shane raises his voice.

SHANE

Tell me you bastard.

Everyone in the lobby stops. Astonished then angry, the Madre De turns to Shane.

MADRE DE

Take care with your tone. Remember who I am.

SHANE

I never forget.

His anger soars more dangerous this time.

MADRE DE

I have had enough disrespect for today. How dare you order me.

SHANE

I think I have the right.

The Madre De's massive shadow floods the floor over Shane as he marches closer. Shane swallows hard twice.

MADRE DE

The right?

SHANE

Yes.

He eyes dig into Shane.

MADRE DE

What right is that young man?

Shane wets his dry lips.

SHANE

To be with Lydia. I love her.

He circles Shane like prey.

MADRE DE

Are you the only one with that right?

Shane is caught off-guard.

SHANE

I don't know.

MADRE DE

Lydia was sent here for someone or something. How can you be certain it was for you? Perhaps you give yourself too much credit. Pride goes before the fall.

SHANE

I'm certain it is for me.

MADRE DE

So much in life is out of one's control. Accept her departure as a blessing.

Shane bows his head for an instant then raises it to meet the Madre De's glare.

SHANE

Lydia said she loves me. No one has told me that before. Not even you, father.

He stares at Shane shocked and hurt. He sighs then collects himself.

MADRE DE

You are surrounded by many who have heard the words, I love you. They wait with false hope.

(MORE)

MADRE DE (CONT'D)

That is why Mon Triomphe is ever growing. It is filled with people and their illusions. I also know the meaning of that phrase. I say it to you every day but you choose not to hear because you are ashamed to be my son. I live with that rejection as only a father can.

He rests his hands on Shane's shoulders. A smile curls at a corner of his mouth. He comes in for the kill.

MADRE DE (CONT'D)

It is time to teach you to carry on so one day Mon Triomphe will be yours.

He returns Shane's gaze with a sinister smile.

MADRE DE (CONT'D)

You will have everything.

SHANE

Except the woman I love.

The Madre De eyes grows dark. He pulls his hands away.

MADRE DE

Why do you love her?

SHANE

Because she isn't you. Everything you can give me still can't compare to her. I would sacrifice anything to be with her.

MADRE DE

Do you mean that? Take great care before you answer.

Shane glares at him, he swallows hard again.

SHANE

Yes.

MADRE DE

There is much about Mon Triomphe I have never told you. I've shielded you from many secrets because you were too young to understand. It's been my dream to one day teach you everything you need to know.

SHANE

I have my own dream.

MADRE DE

How foolish of you, Shane. I thought you had learned by watching me but I see you're just as weak as my late brother. Still, I won't give up on you because after all, you are your father's son.

SHANE

No, I'm not. I want to be free of you and everything here. I must be with Lydia. I will leave Mon Triomphe my own man.

MADRE DE

There is only one way for you to join her. But I warn you, the sacrifice to be made can never be changed; never. That is why so few have left. Fear serves a purpose in our lives. It protects us.

SHANE

I realize now that fear steals from us like a thief.

MADRE DE

I have spent my life protecting you, so that makes me a thief?

SHANE

Not anymore.

The Madre De's anger surfaces.

MADRE DE

Your decision leaves me no choice. You assume Lydia wants to be with you but she doesn't.

SHANE

How do you know that for certain?

MADRE DE

Lydia had a chance to stay or return for you. Instead she left and in her place Sara returned to join Omar.

SHANE

What? I don't believe you.

MADRE DE

It's true, Shane. She begged me to let Sara return in her place. Now, Omar and Sara will enjoy the life Lydia could have had with you.

Doubt eats through him.

SHANE

She wouldn't do that to us.

MADRE DE

Obviously she thinks more of their happiness than yours. Lydia is not worthy of your love.

Shane's eyes search the room for answers. The Madre De senses victory. Shane looks at him with defeat in his eyes. The reality begins to crush him.

Then a soft piano arpeggio is heard from the lounge, "The Blue Rose Waltz" played as only the Contessa can. He turns his head to listen. The Madre De tries to break his concentration.

MADRE DE (CONT'D)

You need my guidance and protection.

Shane is lost in a memory. Defeat and rejection leaves his eyes and is replaced by a glimmer of hope.

SHANE

The Contessa said you disguise your cruelty as love, but that you are just cruel. She is right.

A look of panic rises in the Madre De's eyes.

MADRE DE

You have no idea what you are doing. I can't protect you if you leave. You will feel everything.

SHANE

That is what I'm counting on.

MADRE DE

Don't leave me. I beg you, Shane.

His voice starts to tremble.

MADRE DE (CONT'D)

You are my son. I love you.

Shane swallows with ease.

SHANE

The Greeks didn't give a man a eulogy when he died. They only asked one question, did he live passionately? I'm ready to leave now.

The Contessa walks into the lobby and stands by the reception desk. The Madre De's sees her as hope dies in his eye. Shane addresses her.

SHANE (CONT'D)

Mother, I have never heard you play better.

She takes a few steps closer.

CONTESSA

Shane, you were the only one worth playing for.

The Madre turns to the massive doors and snaps his fingers weakly. They open as Shane walks up the staircase and crosses the threshold without looking back. The Madre De watches him disappear as the doors close.

He addresses the Contessa while still staring at the doors.

MADRE DE

You deceived me.

CONTESSA

Brilliantly.

He turns to face her. She wets her dry lips as he approaches.

MADRE DE

Do you know what you are?

CONTESSA

I know exactly what I am. I have spent years becoming me; and you helped.

MADRE DE

You could have warned me.

CONTESSA

You want lust with trust. That is not how a woman works. Shane and Lydia deserve the chance you stole from me and your brother. Besides, you always forgive me.

MADRE DE
 Forgiveness is only a word.

CONTESSA
 It is a beginning, my dear.

MADRE DE
 Not anymore. Make Shane return before
 it is too late. He will listen to
 you. I'll give you anything.

CONTESSA
 I had everything except the man I
 once loved. You ruined my happiness
 then convinced me it was for the
 best. I won't let you do that to
 Shane and Lydia. I am through
 convincing others, and myself, to
 believe in your lies.

MADRE DE
 I treated you like an equal.

CONTESSA
 Only when I treated you like a
 superior.

MADRE DE
 I beg you because without an heir
 Mon Triomphe will end. All of this
 will end.

CONTESSA
 Thank God.

MADRE DE
 Please.

CONTESSA
 Funny how one clings to life even
 after it is worthless.

He steps forward.

MADRE DE
 Help me.

The Contessa looks at him as a smile curls one corner of her
 mouth.

CONTESSA
 No, my dear.

The Madre De is shocked to his core; broken.

Then he regains his composure. His eyes darken, no white is visible.

MADRE DE

Sadly, your time at Mon Triomphe is over. I never imagined it would end for you, never like this; not you. My darling, what a fool you are to throw it all away. You have been loved by so many for such a long time. You were always loved by me. Always.

He bows then rises and stiffens.

MADRE DE (CONT'D)

However, you will be leaving Mon Triomphe forever.

He steps closer. His massive shadow creeps across the floor to her.

CONTESSA

Tears don't protect anyone, so I won't cry. I am at my zenith. The absolute peak of my decline. How blessed am I.

His shadow engulfs her.

EXT. ABANDONED FIELD - NIGHT

Purple. Crimson. The sky deepens in color. A few faint stars appear. The horses graze unconcerned. The wind increases then subsides.

Shane blinks his eyes open to reveal the field for the first time. He glances at the unknown surroundings ... at the horses ... at the horizon.

Then he spots a woman standing in the center of the field; Lydia.

She's motionless like a statue, and stares at the horizon. A swarm of white butterflies encircle her. He is startled by the sight and calls to her.

SHANE

Lydia. Lydia.

The butterflies soar off into the horizon. She remains transfixed and doesn't move or speak.

SHANE (CONT'D)

Lydia, it's me.

He runs to her, and cradles and kisses her. She barely reacts.

LYDIA

I knew you would come for me. I never doubted how much you love me.

SHANE

We are together now. No one can separate us.

He kisses her again but she doesn't move.

SHANE (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

LYDIA

I am not my body. It is only my body.

SHANE

I don't understand.

LYDIA

Tell me what the Madre De said before you left.

SHANE

A sacrifice must be made for us to be together but he didn't say what kind. Lydia, he's my father, and the Contessa is my mother. I didn't tell you because I felt ashamed.

LYDIA

I suspected it anyway, Shane. I now know all the world is not tainted by evil like Mon Triomphe. It's that dark place inside your father, but it is not in you.

SHANE

I hoped you would return for me, but when you didn't, I decided that I couldn't stay. I never would have left Mon Triomphe without you. Lydia, you saved me.

She reaches out for him and grips his arms. Lydia rehearses the words in her mind before she speaks.

LYDIA

Shane, the Madre De warned me if you left that I would have to trade something of great value in order for you to be free.

SHANE

What do you mean? You came to Mon Triomphe with nothing.

She grips him tighter.

LYDIA

The sacrifice for us to be together is my sight. I can be with you, but never see you again.

SHANE

What? I don't believe it.

LYDIA

It's true.

Shane pulls her closer, and waves his hand by her eyes.

SHANE

It's a lie.

LYDIA

No, Shane.

He grips her tighter.

SHANE

Look at me.

LYDIA

I can't see you.

SHANE

Lydia, you're lying.

LYDIA

No.

He releases her and steps away.

SHANE

What have I done?

LYDIA

You didn't do anything.

SHANE

It's my fault, all my fault. God
what have I done?

LYDIA

There's no blame.

The reality begins to crush Shane.

SHANE

You can't do this for me, Lydia. I
won't let you. I'm worse than my
father now.

LYDIA

You are not your father's son.

SHANE

I'll return and get him to change
you back. I'll do whatever he wants
even if it means staying.

LYDIA

We can't return.

Panic sets in. He loses control.

SHANE

No. No. There must be a way.
Something we can do.

LYDIA

We'll survive. I promise.

SHANE

How can you accept this, Lydia? Why
aren't you enraged at what he's done
to you. He's ruined your life but
you just stand here and take it.
You fight for everyone else but not
for yourself. Why? Why?

LYDIA

Because it's not about me or even
the reward. I know that now.

SHANE

You should hate him as much as I do.

(beat)

No. You should hate me more. I
deserve your hate, I can live with
it, but not your love. Lydia, hate
me. Hate me.

LYDIA

If I do then your father wins. I won't let him control us anymore.

SHANE

Then what was it all for? My life, yours, and everyone who came to Mon Triomphe. We all believed in something. What was it about?

LYDIA

Forgiveness.

SHANE

Forgiveness? No. No. It's not enough. It'll never be enough.

LYDIA

It's a beginning.

Lydia reaches out for him. Shane collapses into her arms.

EXT. ABANDONED FIELD - NIGHT

Stars, and souls, peek through the clouds. The breeze caresses the branches. The birds huddle in the trees and coo.

The horses stroll unconcerned through the field. All is silent; only the sound of the bell is heard.

FADE OUT

THE END