

** MISTRESS OF WAR **

Written by

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EXT. THE FRONT LINES - NIGHT

A hellscape of mud and mercury. CRACK-THUMP of distant mortars. Rain falls like liquid lead.

ELIAS (28), face caked in grey silt, eyes hollowed out by three years of "the push," huddles in a collapsing dugout. He looks less like a man and more like a statue carved from clay.

His hands scarred and shaking, he carefully unfolds a piece of CREAM-COLORED STATIONERY. It's the only clean thing in a five-mile radius.

CLARA (V.O.)

(a warm, melodic voice)

The lilacs are blooming early this year, Elias. I can smell them through the open window as I write this. I imagine you standing there with me, the war a thousand lifetimes away.

Elias presses the paper to his nose. He closes his eyes. For a second, the stench of cordite and rot vanishes.

CLARA (V.O.)

Don't let the mud claim your soul, my love. I am holding a place for you. I am the light at the end of the trench. Come back to me.

Elias kisses the letter. A shell EXPLODES nearby. Dirt showers down. He doesn't flinch. He tucks the letter into his tunic, right over his heart.

Flash Title: *"The Soldier's Mistress of War"*

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

A sharp contrast. The sun is blindingly bright. The architecture is grand and largely untouched by the shelling of war.

Elias walks through a bustling market. He wears a clean, ill-fitting civilian suit. He looks like a ghost haunting a carnival. The sounds of a car backfiring sends his hand instinctively to a hip that no longer carries a holster.

He stops at a corner, checking a handwritten address on the back of an envelope. His fingers trace the "C" in Clara.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Dimly lit. Elias stands before DOOR 4B. He smooths his hair. He's sweating.

He knocks. A soft rhythm.

The door opens.

CLARA (25), stands there. She is beautiful, but not the radiant angel of the letters. She's pale, with dark circles under her eyes. She wears a stained cardigan and holds a stack of files.

ELIAS

Clara.

She looks at him. No recognition. Just a flickering shadow of fear.

CLARA

Are you from the gas company? I told them—

ELIAS

(confused)

It's me. It's Elias.

He reaches out. She flinches back, slamming the door halfway shut.

CLARA

I don't know an Elias.

ELIAS

The lilacs, Clara. The light at the end of the trench. I'm here, I made it back home.

Clara's face goes bone-white. The files in her hand slip, spilling across the floor. Elias looks down.

Dozens of envelopes. Identical cream-colored stationery. Different names on each one: *"Sgt. Miller, Cpl. Thorne, Lt. Vance."*

CLARA

(a whisper)

Oh god. You weren't supposed to find me.

INT. CLARA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Elias pushes past her, entering the cramped, paper-filled room. It's a factory of intimacy. Typewriters, dictionaries, and a ledger titled: "*MORALE INITIATIVE - SECTOR 7.*"

ELIAS

What is this?

CLARA

(trembling)

It was a job, Elias. The Ministry... they said the men were breaking. They needed a reason to keep fighting.

ELIAS

(picking up a letter)

I'm holding a place for you. You wrote this to me.

CLARA

I wrote it to three hundred men. I had a list of adjectives.

Loyal.

Brave.

I was told to give you a dream so you wouldn't mind the nightmare.

Elias looks at her—really looks at her. The woman he loved is a ghost made of ink and state-sponsored lies. He looks at his own hands.

ELIAS

I killed for those letters. I stayed in the mud because I thought someone was smelling the flowers for me.

CLARA

I'm sorry. The Ministry offered me bread and a desk. Please know that I grew to hate the sound of my own pen.

She moves toward him, her hand trembling.

CLARA (CONT'D)

Please, you have to leave. If they see you here—

Loud CAR ENGINE CLANKS outside.

Clara pales even further. She runs to the window, pulling the lace curtain back an inch.

EXT. CITY STREET - CLARA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

A low, black SEDAN pulls up at the curb outside the window. Two men, INITIATIVE AGENTS, in LONG GREY OVERCOATS step out. They move with a synchronization that isn't civilian.

INT. CLARA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Clara closes the curtains and breathes heavily.

CLARA
They're here.

ELIAS
Who?

CLARA
The Initiative. They know. They can't have thousands of soldiers realizing their hearts were a government project. I must say, I've heard rumors that they've been... cleaning up loose ends with some of the writers.

Elias's demeanor shifts. The heartbreak doesn't vanish, but it's buried under a thick layer of CALLOUS VETERAN INSTINCT. He moves to the door, peering through the peephole.

ELIAS
Two of them. Sidearms tucked. Professional.

CLARA
You have to tell them I didn't invite you. Maybe they'll let you go.

ELIAS
(bitterly)
They don't let witnesses go, Clara.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The two Initiative Agents reach the door. One draws a silenced PISTOL. The other prepares a heavy kick for the door.

INT. CLARA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Elias grabs a heavy cast-iron skillet from the kitchen. He gestures for Clara to get behind the heavy oak cabinet.

ELIAS
(low voice)
When I move, you stay down. Don't
scream.

The door EXPLODES inward.

Elias doesn't wait. He's a blur of practiced violence. He slams the edge of the skillet into the first Agent's throat before the man can level his gun.

A CRUNCH of cartilage. The Agent goes down, gasping.

The second Agent fires—PHT-PHT!—the bullets thudding into the Wall.

Elias dives low, sweeping the man's legs. They hit the floor hard. Elias climbs on top of him in a heartbeat, his thumbs finding the soft points beneath the jaw.

The Agent struggles for oxygen and life.

Clara watches, her face twisted in horror. This is the man her letters created. A killing machine fueled by a lie she told.

Elias snaps the man's neck. A dull POP. Silence returns to the room, except for Clara's ragged breathing.

Elias stands up. He's bleeding from a graze on his arm. He looks at the dead men, then at the cream-colored papers scattered on the floor.

ELIAS (CONT'D)
Grab your coat.

CLARA
Where? Where will we go?

ELIAS
To the place you wrote about. The
one with the lilacs.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

Rain-slicked cobblestones. Elias and Clara move through the shadows. He moves like a predator; she moves like a wounded bird.

They stop at the mouth of a dark alley. A train whistle blares in the distance.

CLARA

Why are you doing this?

Elias stops. He looks at her. The anger has cooled into something harder, like tempered steel.

ELIAS

The letters were fake. But the way they made me feel... That was real. It's the only real thing I have left.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out the folded, muddy letter from the trench. He hands it to her.

ELIAS (CONT'D)

Here... read it. Out loud.

CLARA

(tears welling)

I can't.

ELIAS

Please? I need to hear the voice. Not the Ministry's... yours. Even if only once.

Clara looks at the letter. Her own handwriting, stained with his war. She begins to read, but her voice is different now. It's shaky, human, and stripped of the professional polish.

CLARA

I am the light at the end of the trench. Come back to me.

She looks up at him.

CLARA (CONT'D)

I didn't know who you were when I wrote that. I'm sorry.

ELIAS

(softly)

I'm here now. See me?

He takes her hand. It's the first time they've touched without a pen or a weapon between them.

ELIAS (CONT'D)

We head south. My captain has a farm near the border.

(MORE)

ELIAS (CONT'D)

They won't look for a dead writer
and a ghost soldier there.

CLARA

What do we do when we get there? I
don't know how to be... this.

ELIAS

We start with the truth. It'll be a
lot shorter than your letters.

He leads her into the fog toward the train tracks.

INT. SMALL COTTAGE - NIGHT (MONTHS LATER)

A simple room. A fire crackles in the hearth. No typewriters.
No files.

Elias sits at a wooden table, carving a piece of cedar. His
hands are steady.

Clara enters from the garden. She carries a bundle of wild
PURPLE FLOWERS. They aren't perfect, and they aren't lilacs,
but they are real.

She sets them in a jar on the table.

CLARA

The weather's turning. We should
wood-up the fireplace.

Elias looks at her. There is no "romantic noir" lighting
here. Just the glow of a lamp on two people who have seen the
worst of the world.

ELIAS

I'll do it tomorrow.

CLARA

Elias?

He looks up.

CLARA (CONT'D)

I'm glad you came home.

Elias smiles and reaches across the table to take her hand.

ELIAS

Me too.

THE END