

The Black Swallow

by

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EUGENE (V.O.)

They say love makes you do crazy things. That was when I realized I was in love.

DAVID (V.O.)

She must've been quite a girl.

EUGENE (V.O.)

No, not with Chloe. I mean, she was great. But I was in love with France.

DEMONSTRATOR

Our leaders are mad with greed. They don't care how much of our blood is shed for them to settle their scores. They don't care about YOU! We must stand up to them! Tell the politicians we say NO TO WAR!

Eugene buys a paper. The headline reads:

"Germany Declares War On Russia. Is France Next?"

EUGENE (V.O.)

So I did what any fool would do to protect what he loves. I joined The Foreign Legion.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

In the bedroom at night Eugene waits for Chloe to stop crying.

EUGENE

They say the war'll be over in a few weeks. And we can be together again.

CHLOE

Listen to yourself. You're so excited to run to your death.

EUGENE

I thought you'd be proud. I am a fighter, you know.

CHLOE

There's a big difference between gloves and bullets, American.

EUGENE

Chloe, I'll be fine. I promise you.

CHLOE

Oh, so you're God now? This isn't even your country.

EUGENE

It's more my country than America ever was.

CHLOE

You just barge your way into my life, steal my heart then run off to play soldiers.

EUGENE

(takes her hand)

I stole your heart?

CHLOE

Yes. With your perfect black skin and that stupid, beautiful smile.

EUGENE

(smiles)

You mean this one? Just wait for me, Chloe.

Chloe takes her hand away.

CHLOE

(tears come again)

Wait for them to tell me you're dead? Wait for that pain to one day go away? No, American. I won't waste my life mourning you.

(gathers herself)

For me, it is better if you die now. So go. Get out. I will never see you again.

EUGENE

Chloe, don't do this.

She turns her back to him. Eugene gets up and walks to the door.

EUGENE (CONT'D)

Will you come to the parade?

CHLOE

I'd rather die.

EXT. STREET. DAY

Crowds line the streets of Paris. In full military uniform Eugene stands to attention alongside dozens of soldiers from all ethnic backgrounds. On cue the soldiers shout:

"We serve France with Honor and Loyalty!"

Then the men begin to march. In the crowd Chloe sees Eugene. She hides her face as he passes her. We HOLD on Eugene as the sound of artillery fire fades up and we

CUT TO:

The Battle Of Verdun. Eugene and his unit stagger blindly through the desolate, misty mud plains as bullets and grenades rain down. Suddenly a German flamethrower crew torches the men to Eugene's left. As his brothers in arms fall, screaming in agony, Eugene ducks and rolls under the flames. He crawls to a smouldering tank for cover.

EUGENE (V.O.)

After surviving The Somme I was chosen for France's elite kill squad: "The Swallows Of Death". I was the only black man so naturally they called me "The Black Swallow Of Death." I thought it sounded... cool.

The mayhem of Verdun is hell on earth. But as German soldiers pour forward Eugene smiles - he's enjoying this. He jumps out from his hiding place and mows down dozens of enemy soldiers with his machine gun. In the heat of battle Eugene moves with precision and ease, as if he has extrasensory perception. Always he evades death by millimeters.

EUGENE (V.O.)

I was even more at home on the battlefield than I was in the ring. I kept saying Dixie's mantra over and over: "Feel nothing. See everything. Be as cold as ice." I was and I could. I really could. Eventually it got to where the shelling, the screams, the killing, it all just became...MUSIC.

We hear ADAGIO FOR SPARTACUS as Eugene sidesteps an enemy soldier's bayonet, pirouets like a ballet dancer and plunges his dagger into the man's neck. Still moving as if on stage he yanks the blade out and slashes the stomach of another soldier behind him.

The music stops when a grenade explodes and sends Eugene flying. He lands in a heap in the sodden mud. Bullets strafe the ground. He rolls and falls into a trench.

A beat.

In the trench a German soldier turns the corner. Eugene fires his rifle, shredding the man's stomach. The soldier staggers back and falls. Eugene aims again but he's out of ammo. He throws his rifle aside and unsheaths his dagger. As he moves in for the kill machine gun fire chews up ground before him. He steps back and the shooting stops.

The German soldier, lying in a pool of filth and blood, looks at Eugene. Eugene moves forward and again gunfire stops him. The two men look at one another. One dying, the other unable to move.

EUGENE (V.O.)

There we were, the two of us. Stuck in that rat infested cess-pit, close enough to see the color of each other's eyes. And all we could do was wait. I don't know how long we sat there. Two, three days maybe. Long enough to lose my mind.

A gas canister falls into the trench. Both men rush to pull on their gas masks. Eugene gets his on then watches the German soldier struggle desperately to tighten his. As the deadly chemical eats away at the man's eyes he finally gets the mask on. Eugene is struck by a curious sense of shared relief. He gives his enemy a thumbs up. Then the cloud obscures everything.

CUT TO:

Later that evening. The gas has cleared. Eugene pulls his mask off and takes out his dagger. He throws a stone onto the ground. No gunfire. He hurries over, grabs the German by the scruff of the neck and sees - the man he has his hands on has become KLAUS.

KLAUS

Maestro! Wie geht's dir?

Eugene lets go.

EUGENE

Klaus? What - what are you doing here?

KLAUS

What does it look like? Getting shot by you, Kleiner.

EUGENE

What? It can't be you -

Klaus starts bleeding from the mouth.

KLAUS

And look at the state of this place, Eugene. You've not being doing your chores.

Klaus laughs. Then his laughter becomes a death rattle. Eugene rubs his eyes and stares in disbelief; Klaus is no longer there. In his place is the dead German soldier.

A beat.

Eugene tries to focus, clear his head. We hear the faint sound of men shouting. The voices are American. They sound excited. Then we hear a dog BARKING - sounds we've heard before.

KLANSMAN #1 (O.S.)

The nigger's down here, boys!

A man wearing the pointed white hat of the KKK appears over the rim of the trench, followed by two more. The first removes his mask; it's the leader of the Klansmen that killed Eugene's father.

KLANSMAN #1 (CONT'D)

(smiles)

That leg still giving you trouble?

Eugene looks down - his right leg is bleeding.

KLANSMAN #1 (CONT'D)

Oh, we are gonna make you dance, boy.

For a moment Eugene is paralysed, overcome by the terror of the night his father died. He snaps out of it.

EUGENE

No.

The dog strains at the leash.

EUGENE (CONT'D)

Not this time.

With blurring speed Eugene pulls out his dagger and leaps at the Klansmen. He twists and turns, cutting them to shreds. Within moments, all three are dead.

A beat.

Eugene catches his breath. At his feet are three more dead German soldiers.

Eugene drags himself out of the trench and looks around; nothing but carnage as far as the eye can see. He winces at a sudden, stabbing pain in his leg. He tries to steady himself but collapses.

CUT TO:

A huge pile of dead soldiers, several feet high. A lone officer counts bodies and scribbles in his book, trying somehow to make order of the chaos.

Eugene lies on the top of the pile. Is he dead? His eyes flicker open as he sees several biplanes fly overhead. He traces their path with his fingers.

The officer walks over, still scribbling. Eugene reaches down and grabs him.

EUGENE (CONT'D)

(faint)

I'm The Black Swallow Of Death.

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL. DAY

Eugene is in bed, one of hundreds of France's wounded. Military bigwig COMMANDER DUPONT (50) is led over by a nurse.

COMMANDER DUPONT

Lieutenant Bullard, I am Commander Sergeant Dupont. As the sole survivor of your unit, I am here to award you The Bronze Star for your immense courage in the face of unsurmountable odds.

EUGENE

I'm the only survivor?

COMMANDER DUPONT

Yes. Unfortunately no one else survived. It seems you have made quite the habit of not dying when everyone else does. People are even saying you have a guardian angel.

(MORE)

COMMANDER DUPONT (CONT'D)

Or that you have made a pact with
the devil. It depends who you ask.

Eugene tries to digest the news.

COMMANDER DUPONT (CONT'D)

Anyway, to honour your courage and
sacrifice, I award you The Bronze
Star as a token of France's
gratitude. Now where should I - ?

Eugene points to the bedside cabinet. On it are five other
medals for bravery. Commander Dupont places Eugene's latest
medal with the others.

COMMANDER DUPONT (CONT'D)

(runs his finger over the medals)

Knight of the Legion of Honor,
Voluntary Enlistment Medal, Battle
of the Somme Medal. If the war
effort runs out of metal we know
where to come, eh?

EUGENE

(smiles)

When can I get back out there?

COMMANDER DUPONT

Excuse me?

EUGENE

Or is the war over?

Commander Dupont shakes his head.

COMMANDER DUPONT

No it is not.

EUGENE

Then I need to get back out.

COMMANDER DUPONT

Lieutenant Bullard, I have been
told by your doctors that your leg
was badly injured. Walking again
will be difficult and take time.

A beat.

EUGENE

Who said anything about walking?
I'm gonna fly.