



HEART OF FIRE

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST - DAY

SUPER: SAMOA - 1905

A pair of boots race down a trail as the ground shakes beneath them.

A thicket of trees totter back and forth as a dull ROAR grows in intensity through the lush jungle. Birds fly away from the source.

Above the canopy, smoke billows out of Mount Matavanu, while a fast moving flow of lava and debris race down its face in the distance.

INT. FOREST - CONTINUOUS

KARL GOTTLIEB (32, rusty-stubble beard, could lose ten pounds) races down a forest path, eyes focused ahead. Scared.

KARL
Martha. Please, God.

He disappears down the path as trees shake violently all around him.

EXT. SAMOAN VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

Karl runs out from the dense forest into a clearing along a dirt road heading into a small village while dark ash falls from the sky like heavy gray snow in Hell.

He YELLS at the caravan of packed mules and villagers, as a group of small children catch up from behind.

KARL
Get to town! Hurry! ALU! ALU!

He scans the villagers for a familiar face. Pleads.

Looks back up at the mountain, carnage and death approaching.

Turns his attention toward the edge of the village.

Runs opposite of the caravan. Picks up the pace.

INT. VILLAGE HOUSE - LATER

Karl races into the simple two-room home.

KARL
MARTHA! MARTHA?

There aren't many places to look in here. He races back outside.

EXT. VILLAGE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Karl glances toward the opposite side of the village, at the concrete church nestled beneath the edge of the canopy.

The ground RUMBLES underneath him as he catches his balance and sees the chaos approach just behind the church.

His eyes bulge.

Trees COLLAPSE around and into the church. The debris flow is upon them.

He runs toward it.

EXT. VILLAGE CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

By the time he gets halfway there, the thatched roof is ablaze and falls inward, as the structure becomes surrounded by scalding rock, mud, and lava flow.

Through the open church doors, the outline of a WOMAN and a PRIEST can be seen through the black smoke and flames.

The flaming roof COLLAPSES into them, and their silhouette disappears into fire.

Karl stops in his tracks. Falls to his knees.

KARL
NOOO!

A VILLAGER rushes up from behind and grabs his shoulder.

He pulls Karl up and away from the oncoming flow.

Karl fights him. Then turns back to the concrete husk on fire. Tears stream from his face as he YELLS out.

KARL (cont'd)
DAMN YOU!

CUT TO:

EXT. PARIS CAFE - MORNING

Close up on a black and white picture of a beautiful young woman in her prime. Outlined in gold.

Opposite an exquisite time piece. A masterpiece in precision. A pocket watch.

Karl, now 45, closes the lid of his watch and sips his coffee as cars dart down the busy street across from Académie des Sciences.

SUPER: PARIS - 1918

An immense building. Row after endless row of glass and marble stretch an entire city block as the building dominates the landscape.

HANS KLEIBER (55, glasses, losing the battle of gray hair) steps out of the front of the building, and looks around.

He crosses the street toward the small cafe.

EXT. PARIS CAFE - LATER

Karl stirs his cup of espresso while reading the newspaper.

Hans comes up to the table and takes a seat. Karl doesn't look up.

HANS
Good morning, Karl.

Karl continues to read his paper, reaches around to his cup, as it disappears behind the paper.

Hans shakes his head.

HANS (cont'd)
Still sociable as always, I see.

The cup reappears from around the paper. Set on the table.

HANS (cont'd)
We don't have time for this.

KARL
What, then, is so urgent as to drag me out of bed?

HANS
Karthala. It's active.

Karl appears from behind the newspaper. Eyes pained.

KARL
What does that have to do with me?

HANS
It's an opportunity to finish your work on shield volcanoes. There hasn't been an active one since Samoa. And to prove that what happened at Matavanu wasn't on you. You have to go. It's your legacy.

Karl stares down at his coffee. Takes a breath.

KARL
Who are we meeting?

HANS
Expedition financiers. In Ile De La Cite.

KARL
What time?

HANS
We have to leave.

KARL
The meeting! What time?

HANS
Two o'clock, come on!

Hans straightens his jacket. Waits for Karl to get up, but he doesn't move. He grabs the paper from the table.

HANS (cont'd)
We need to get going.

Karl snatches the paper back and opens his pocket watch.

KARL
The meeting is at Ile De La Cite. It takes about one thousand, four hundred paces to get there, around eighteen and a half minutes. For you, twenty. It's 1:25. That gives us fifteen minutes. So, sit down, order an espresso, and let me finish my coffee.

Karl closes his pocket watch, opens up the paper, and takes a sip of his coffee.

Hans grunts, sits down and signals for the server.

HANS
Mademoiselle?

EXT. PARIS SIDEWALK - LATER

Karl walks briskly as Hans struggles to keep up.

HANS
Have you read the latest of
Mercalli's notes?

KARL
No.

HANS
They were just released.

KARL
I don't care.

HANS
I just thought you would want to-

KARL
You thought wrong.

HANS
They're fascinating. He gives
extensive details of his work with
Vesuvius, along with pictures-

KARL
I said I don't care.

Annoyed, Karl quickens the pace.

HANS
For god sakes, slow down.

KARL
I will when you stop talking.

HANS
Fine, fine.

Hans slows down a bit more, and Karl relents. Waits for him to catch up a step.

EXT. ILE DE LA CITE COURTYARD - LATER

Hans stops outside Sainte-Chapelle and wipes his brow as Karl continues on.

Karl stops two steps ahead. Turns. Looks up at the spire.

KARL
No.

HANS
Karl-

KARL
Only you would take money from the enemy.

HANS
We need to get there and they have a boat. Stop being so dramatic. Gold is gold.

Hans enters.

Karl pauses, grunts, and follows him inside.

INT. PRIEST'S OFFICE - LATER

Large bookcases filled with old leather-bound tomes line the walls. Inside the room is a large table along with several ornate oak chairs, as well as a decorative desk.

Sitting at that desk are FATHER NOUVEL (70's, balding, thin) and a younger man, FRIAR JEAN (25, pale, clean-cut), deep into a lesson when interrupted by a KNOCK at the door.

Nouvel waves them inside, as they get up and walk toward the table, Nouvel taking a large scroll with him.

NOUVEL
Please, come in.

Hans is all smiles while Karl grimaces as they walk forward.

HANS
Morning, Father. May I introduce my associate, Karl Gottlieb.

NOUVEL
Pleasure to meet you.

Karl ignores the pleasantries. Stares at Nouvel.

KARL

Can we get on with it?

HANS

Pardon his manners. Let's discuss details.

Nouvel hands the scroll to Karl, who opens it on the table.

A map.

Nouvel points to an island off Africa.

NOUVEL

Tell me about Comoros.

KARL

French Colony. Volcanic island, with a single peak, Mt. Karthala. Any expedition should have a minimum two man team, with locals in support.

NOUVEL

And?

KARL

You'll need a cartographer, a pair of hunters, a seismologist, and a cook. But Hans already knows this. What do you really want to know?

NOUVEL

The dangers of running this particular expedition.

KARL

If Karthala truly has become active, it's extremely dangerous. Add anything with a religious tone and the risks increase further.

NOUVEL

And why is that?

KARL

Local population is mostly Muslim. Muslim and Christians have a bit of a history, wouldn't you agree?

Karl glances at the map, waits for a response to his slight.

KARL (cont'd)
Why are you so interested in
Comoros? What's in it for you?

NOUVEL
To bring Jean to the island.

KARL
Jean? Who's Jean?

Jean leans forward.

JEAN
I am Friar Jean.

KARL
I'm sorry...is this a mission trip?

NOUVEL
Yes, it is.

KARL
Who else would fund a pointless
expedition but an organization with
an immeasurable amount of wealth
extorted from the suffering of
everyone around them?

Jean stands up, offended.

JEAN
Monsieur, salvation is anything but
pointless. It is essential!

Nouvel signals for Jean to sit, and he complies.

Hans squirms in his seat, as Karl turns to him, glaring.

KARL
You make us so proud.

Hans takes control.

HANS
The diocese has agreed to fund your
expedition, everything from the
ship to the supplies.

KARL
My expedition? No, no, no. I'm a
consultant. I'm retired.

HANS
The Académie will pay handsomely
for any data you bring back.

KARL
I'm no longer in the Académie,
remember?

HANS
Would you like to change that?

Karl glares at Hans, then gestures back toward Nouvel.

KARL
This is an extremely dangerous
environment.

NOUVEL
We're prepared for the worst, my
son.

KARL
I'm not your son.

NOUVEL
Why are you so angry?

Karl glares at Hans, takes a deep breath and stands.

KARL
I won't have anything to do with a
mission trip.

And with that, Karl leaves.

Hans turns back to Nouvel.

HANS
Get the boat and supplies ready.
I'll take care of Karl.

EXT. PONT NEUF - LATER

Karl pushes his way through the crowded bridge at Pont Neuf,
intent on getting as far away from the church as possible.

KARL
A mission trip! Unbelieva-

A WOMAN wearing a white lace dress walks toward him and he
stops in his tracks.

He watches her, mouth ajar, as she approaches.

Her brown hair. Brown eyes.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK - EXT. SAMOAN VILLAGE - DAY

Karl, alone, in the center of the village, faces the church.

He stumbles forward, legs unable to move.

The ground shakes as buildings all around him fall apart.

Martha, wearing a similar white dress stands in the doorway of the church. Next to a priest.

The trees collapse in a ROAR around the church as the roof bursts into flame.

Karl clutches his head and screams.

END FLASHBACK

CUT TO:

EXT. PONT NEUF - CONTINUOUS

Karl steps backward in a daze and bumps hard into-

A YOUNG BOY, lugging an oversized and overloaded backpack of baguettes, who stumbles backward. The boy spins, catches his leg on the edge of the bridge, and starts to go over.

Baguettes fall into the Seine as the boy GASPS.

Karl snaps out of it, and grabs the boy at the last moment, bringing him back to his feet.

The boy looks at the near empty backpack and yells at him.

BOY
Mon pain! Mon pain!

KARL
Watch where you're going.

Karl takes a bill from his wallet and tucks it in the boy's shirt pocket before looking again for the woman in white.

She is gone.

INT. CHURCH SACRISTY - LATER

Friar Jean lifts a heavy crate onto the table and opens it. Takes bibles from one and loads them into another crate in the small room filled with robes and vestments.

Father Nouvel steps into the doorway.

NOUVEL

Friar, do you have a moment?

JEAN

Of course, Father.

Nouvel disappears from the doorway and Jean puts the bibles down and follows him into the-

SANCTUARY

-catching up to him as Nouvel walks slowly through the empty room, bathed in the glow of stained glass colors.

NOUVEL

This is your first mission.

JEAN

Yes, Father.

NOUVEL

Tell me, son, do you understand the importance of a mission?

JEAN

Of course. To spread the Good Word and share the works of God.

NOUVEL

Yes, yes, but you can do that here, can you not? What is the true purpose of this trip?

JEAN

True purpose?

Nouvel sits in one of the pews. Jean follows.

NOUVEL

Hope.

JEAN

Father?

NOUVEL

You are about to embark on a journey of great hope, not just to share the Living Word but to save these natives from a fiery hell. It's imperative that you succeed on this trip, Friar Jean. You are the mustard seed. Salvation is their only hope.

JEAN

I understand, Father. I will not let you down. I will not let the Church down.

Nouvel leaves Jean sitting alone in the pew, as he stares up at the cross.

INT. PARIS APARTMENT - NIGHT

Karl sits at the edge of his bed, body sweaty and tense. He looks around the room, rubbing his forehead and eyes.

KARL

Not again. Please stop.

BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM

The door.

HANS (O.S.)

Karl!

Karl throws a look toward the door as he puts on a shirt and stumbles toward it.

KARL

Go away.

Hans opens the door and enters anyway. Closes it behind him.

Karl slumps at the kitchen table, exhausted. A half-empty bottle of whiskey next to a glass.

He pours without looking up.

HANS

I apologize for the ambush at the church. That was boorish.

Karl takes a slug. Eyes never leaving his. Pauses.

KARL
Want one?

HANS
Please...and thank you.

Karl gets up and finds a glass. Sloshes the whiskey into it and sits back down.

Hans joins him at the table.

HANS (cont'd)
I assumed you would be open to
having your study funded. Even if
by the Catholic Church.

Karl glares at him.

KARL
You could have told me at the cafe.

HANS
(shrugs)
Then you wouldn't have agreed to
the meeting.

KARL
So now I have to embrace a lie to
complete my life's work?

HANS
Let them help you finish your work.
Who cares about their philosophy?

Karl takes a long pull from his glass.

KARL
Find another way. Any other boat.

HANS
To Comoros? It's not Madrid, it's a
miracle I found this one.

KARL
I am surrounded by lies.

HANS
Don't throw this away. You need a
new start.

Karl's bloodshot eyes lock onto his. Tired.

HANS (cont'd)
 Still can't sleep, huh? Come on.
 Let's grab a real drink.

Hans gets up and heads to the door. Wraps his neck with a scarf and turns.

Karl looks up and finishes his glass in one slug.

KARL
 You're buying.

INT. PARIS BAR - NIGHT

The bar is dimly lit, with only a few patrons scattered about. A man in the corner plays an out of tune piano.

A row of shot glasses is filled on the counter.

Karl stares down at the clear drinks in front of him and opens the gold pocket watch.

He picks up a glass, toasts to his wife, and slams it.

HANS
 None of that was your fault.

Karl rolls his eyes and takes another shot.

HANS (cont'd)
 You can keep blaming yourself or
 you can do something about it.

KARL
 I am doing something about it. It's
 called drinking.

HANS
 You call that drinking?

Hans rolls cognac in his snifter and inhales the aroma, then turns to face Karl.

HANS (cont'd)
 Now this, this is a drink.
 (inhales)
 Bold. And like this cognac, you
 need to be bold. Take this
 expedition. Take their money.

Karl rolls his eyes and takes another drink instead.

Hans takes a sip of his drink. Eyes never leave his.

Karl blinks.

KARL
Anyone ever been to that mountain
of yours?

HANS
Yes, several years ago.

KARL
And?

HANS
We haven't heard from them.

KARL
Well that's great! Christ, here we
go...captured, or worse yet--

HANS
--We don't know. It could have been
anything.

KARL
That's exactly right, anything!
Killed, dysentery, or worse, eaten!

Karl takes another shot, and indicates for the bartender to
refill all the glasses in front of him.

HANS
You're being dramatic. The French
have an impressive colony there.

KARL
Then you should go.

HANS
Are your dreams getting any better?

Karl reaches for a shot, but Hans puts his hand on Karl's to
stop him. Squeezes it.

Karl slowly shakes his head 'no'.

Hans lets go and Karl downs the shot.

KARL
And then what? Ferry some priest
around as he tries to convert the
very people who want to kill us?

HANS
That's not always true.