

DOROTHY

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EXT. DOVE COTTAGE - GARDEN - LATE AFTERNOON

DOROTHY kneels in the garden, tearing at the weeds with strange fervor. Sleeves rolled up, hands dirty, hair coming loose.

Behind her, through the cottage window, WILLIAM writes.

Dorothy rips up a fistful of weeds. The roots rip from the wet soil.

She exhales, brushing a strand of hair from her face and inevitably smearing dirt across her forehead. She looks up.

Then she sees him.

Across the field, SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE appears beyond a fence walking through the tall grass.

Dorothy freezes.

SAMUEL ignores the gate. Instead, he plants both hands on the top rail and vaults over the fence. Badly. His coat catches. One boot kicks out. He nearly goes down.

Dorothy's mouth parts slightly.

Samuel lands in the field, gathers himself, then strides toward the cottage, coat flapping, hair wild in the wind.

He is already talking to himself.

Dorothy grips the weeds in her fist. The green stalks crush in her palm.

She looks down at them. At the bruised leaves, the wet earth under her knees.

Then back at him and her breath involuntarily catches. A flush rises at her throat. She looks away almost immediately.

She presses the weeds harder in her hand.

SAMUEL
(calling)
MISS WORDSWORTH!

Dorothy rises too quickly and nearly slips in the mud.

She catches herself.

Mud stains her skirt. She looks feral, tries to fix her hair. Fails.

DOROTHY
Mr. Coleridge.

Samuel reaches the garden wall, breathless and bright-eyed.

SAMUEL
I have come with a thought.

DOROTHY
I can see that.

SAMUEL
Can you?

DOROTHY
It- it entered the field before you
did.

She gestures towards the gate. Samuel laughs.

She smiles but it doesn't quite reach her eyes.

A beat.

He looks at the weeds clutched in her fist.

SAMUEL
Have I interrupted a murder?

Dorothy follows his eyes, visibly confused.

DOROTHY
Well... Yes? I believe you have.

SAMUEL
What was the victim?

A beat.

Her eyes travel over him.

DOROTHY
Something invasive.

The word hangs between them.

Inside the cottage, a CHAIR SCRAPES.

Neither of them turns.

Samuel glances toward the window, then back at Dorothy.

She's shifted her stance. Chin up, spine taut.

Something in his expression softens. A flicker of concern, almost apologetic, as though he's suddenly aware he might be making her uncomfortable.

Dorothy catches it and offers him a polite smile in return. She straightens again, fingers fidgeting at her sides, then gives a small, self-conscious shrug.

DOROTHY

Well, come on in then! Before my
brother turns you into a cloud.

Coleridge bows and starts toward the cottage, then glances back over his shoulder.

SAMUEL

And what will you turn me into,
Miss Wordsworth?

A beat.

Dorothy watches him intently. Samuel walks backwards a few steps, smiling at her, before finally turning away.

DOROTHY

(quietly, to herself)
A fever, perhaps.

Samuel walks through the door.

CUT TO:

INT. COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

WILLIAM stands a few feet from his writing desk, caught mid-step in a way that suggests he has been eavesdropping.

SAMUEL enters.

William quickly gathers himself, then smiles warmly and opens his arms.

WILLIAM

Samuel!

He embraces him warmly, already steering him toward the desk.

WILLIAM

I've been meaning to show you
something. I need a pair of
unspoiled eyes.

A deliberate glance at Dorothy.

SAMUEL
Unspoiled you say. Then I fear you
may have sent for the wrong man.

WILLIAM
Nonsense! I liked your... I liked the...

He searches for it.

WILLIAM
The one with the sailor!

Samuel barely hears him. His eyes remain fixed on DOROTHY
through the window, still attacking the garden.

SAMUEL
(absently)
The Ancient Mariner.

WILLIAM
Precisely!

William follows Samuel's gaze. His enthusiasm falters for a
beat. He pulls a tissue out and starts cleaning his glasses.

WILLIAM
(not looking up)
She prefers it.

SAMUEL
I beg your pardon?

WILLIAM
(gestures towards the
widow)
Dorothy. The dirt. Sun on her face.
Quite impossible to reason with
once she's been outdoors too long.

He watches her.

WILLIAM
Still, I've always had a weakness
for things in their natural state.

A beat.

WILLIAM
Anyways, come here. Come here and
sit.

William ushers Samuel onto the chair and thrusts the pages into his hands.

Samuel settles into the chair, immediately absorbed. He reads under his breath, following the lines with his finger.

He stops.

A word has been struck through in the margin. Another written above it.

Samuel considers it.

SAMUEL
(under his breath)
Better.

He turns the page. Another correction.

SAMUEL
Much better.

William shifts.

Samuel looks up.

SAMUEL
She's very good.

WILLIAM
Hm?

Samuel gives the slightest nod towards Dorothy.

William's expression tightens.

SAMUEL
I would have marked the same passages.

WILLIAM
Ah, well- yes. I have taken some care with her education. She has a remarkably sharp mind. I've always thought so.

A beat.

WILLIAM
One only has to give it proper direction.

Outside, Dorothy straightens, wipes her palms on her skirt,
and glances back toward the cottage.

Through the glass, they eyes lock.

Neither looks away first.