

- 1) 20. 08. 2018
- 2) 17. 05. 2026

THE BALLET DANCER

Written by

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INT. PADDINGTON STATION - NIGHT

The wrought-iron station hums with departures. WILLIAM (28) stands near the barriers of the Heathrow Express.

He wears an old, slightly frayed tweed suit, an academic who spends his evenings absorbed in archives rather than modernity.

He is terribly anxious. He scans the sea of commuters, rising onto his toes, desperately waiting for a face yet to appear.

His hands tremble slightly as he clutches a leather satchel. A fundamental rupture has occurred in his ordered life.

WILLIAM (V.O.)

It is the last time that I shall fall in love. She was probably the one. But we say that every time, and I tell it to myself now to make it true. What does it matter? It makes no difference who loves whom, we cannot be together. I am flying to New York. I only met her 3 days ago. But, my God, already I love her. I love her so deeply it kills me, like a small child displaced from its mother.

INT. ROYAL OPERA HOUSE - NIGHT

The auditorium is plunged into reverent darkness. On the soundtrack, the sweeping strings of Tchaikovsky, *Tempo di valse*.

William sits alone in the stalls. He is spellbound, tears making slow tracks down his cheeks.

On the brilliantly lit stage, STELLA (23) performs. Dressed in the white-feathered tutu of Princess Odette, principal dancer.

Her form is classical, her movements defying gravity. She is distinct in her beauty, but there is a tragic, trapped quality.

WILLIAM (V.O.)

It was a transcendent evening. I like to spend my Friday nights alone in a theatre, star-gazing at beautiful illusions. But tonight was different. I felt profoundly touched by Princess Odette. The dancer possessed an inexplicably melancholic charm. I was certain that somehow, even sitting in the pitch dark of the stalls, she could feel the rapture in my heart.

(MORE)

WILLIAM (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
In that moment, I believed in the  
shared destiny of lovers.

EXT. ROYAL OPERA HOUSE - NIGHT

A sudden downpour. The glorious warmth of the theatre dissolves into the nasty reality of Covent Garden under a cold deluge.

OPERA-GOERS huddle under umbrellas, shuffling hurriedly into idling black cabs.

William stands alone, unprotected from the rain. He hovers on the grand steps, anxiously checking his watch, but present.

WILLIAM (V.O.)  
For all the sudden pangs in my heart,  
I had to know who she was.

William crosses the rain-slicked street. He takes refuge opposite the entrance, beside the bronze Young Dancer sculpture.

He keeps one eye fixed squarely on the bright glass doors of the Opera House.

The doors open. Stella exits.

Beside her is PAOLO (58), the Teatro Scala company director. He is handsome despite age, and dressed/groomed to perfection.

He holds Stella. His grip on her upper arm is vice-like, possessive. He leans in, speaking into her ear.

It's an authority that makes Stella physically shrink. He steers her forcefully towards the back door of a waiting cab.

William watches the door slam shut, locking her in. Acting on instinct, he abandons common sense and steps out into the rain.

He hails the next cab.

NT. BLACK CAB - NIGHT

The CABBIE, an older man with a soft Essex accent, catches William's manic reflection in the rearview mirror.

CABBIE  
Where to, mate?

William leans forwards, his eyes locked on the taillights of the cab ahead, currently turning north.

WILLIAM  
Holborn. Please. Just follow that cab.

CABBIE  
Holborn? Not far, that. What's the drop?

WILLIAM  
(A slight stammer)  
I- I forget the name of the hotel. It will come to me. Just keep going north, please.

CABBIE  
Right you are, Sir.

The midnight traffic is sparse, not a single car between William and his quarry.

Through the wet windshield, he can make out their silhouettes in the cab ahead. Paolo leans aggressively over Stella.

They pass the iron railings of BLOOMSBURY SQUARE GARDENS, then the colonnades of SICILIAN AVENUE.

Stella's cab turns off High Holborn, pulling into a grand, unmistakable Edwardian courtyard. THE ROSEWOOD HOTEL.

WILLIAM  
There. That's the one.

CABBIE  
Ah. The Rosewood. Very nice. Want me to pull right into the courtyard?

WILLIAM  
No! No. Just drop me outside on the street. I don't even need a porter. I prefer... Privacy.

William snaps his mouth shut, over-explaining. He pinches the bridge of his nose, a breathing tic.

He hands a crumpled 20 pound note through the partition.

INT. ROSEWOOD HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

William pushes through the revolving doors.

The interior is magnificent neo-baroque. High marble archways, dressed in pristine white and gold, lit by shadowed alcoves.

Across the vast lobby, Stella and Paolo stand at the elevator bank. Stella looks defeated by the long night.

As the silver doors open, she makes a sudden leap for the adjacent stairwell, but Paolo catches her arm.

He forcefully ushers her back and into the lift. William follows, and tracks the digital floor indicator above the doors.

1. 2...

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)

Looking for a room for the night, Sir?

A sharp-suited RECEPTIONIST has stepped into his path, wearing a polite but highly clinical smile.

William is startled, but even so he glances back at the elevator indicator... 3. 4. DING. The indicator stops on FIVE.

WILLIAM

Yes. How much?

RECEPTIONIST

We have an Executive King available  
for 600 pounds. Marked down from 9.  
Quite the bargain for a Friday night.'

WILLIAM

Right. Excuse me one moment.

William pulls his mobile phone from his pocket. He presses it to his ear, fabricating a conversation with breathless urgency.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Yes? Hello? Yes, I'm in the lobby now-  
Uhuh-

He paces behind a fluted marble pillar.

The moment the receptionist turns, distracted, to greet a WEALTHY COUPLE entering with luggage, William hangs up.

He darts into the emergency stairwell. Not alarmed.

INT. EMERGENCY STAIRWELL - NIGHT

The acoustics shift from the hushed luxury of the lobby to a harsh, echoing concrete. William charges up the stairs.

His suit feels heavy, his lungs burn, he is entirely out of his depth, propelled only by adrenaline and an irrational love.

He hits the 5th floor landing and pushes the door open an inch.

INT. 5TH FLOOR CORRIDOR - DAY

The corridor is lined with antique mirrors and thick carpeting of questionable taste. 50 yards down, a mahogany door slams.

ROOM 512.

William steps out of the stairwell. Silence, until a voice croaks through the wooden doorframe of Room 512.

It is Paolo's voice, loud, unmistakable, laced with a commanding Neapolitan accent. William shuffles down the corridor.

He stops outside the door, pressing his back flat against the flocked wallpaper, and tunes his ear right in.

INT. ROSEWOOD BEDROOM (ROOM 512) - CONTINUOUS

The suite shows off Edwardian luxury. High ceilings, sash windows, heavy velvet drapes.

Stella stands at a mirrored wet bar, her hands shaking as she pours gin into a crystal mixing glass.

Paolo paces like an animal up and down the carpet behind her. He stops and stares at the flawless line of her back.

PAOLO

Alright. I am sorry, Stella. Do you hear me? I lost my temper.

STELLA

(without turning around)

What difference does it make? You say it, but you do not change. What do you want from me, Paolo?

PAOLO

Your love! You promised me that much.

STELLA

I promised to dance. I never promised you my soul.

PAOLO

I pulled you out from the chorus of mediocrity and I gave you the world's stages! I spoiled you, Stella, and it has turned you rotten and ungrateful.

STELLA  
Get out. Go away.

PAOLO  
(his voice drops)  
I have given you everything. Just tell  
me what you want. You know I can buy  
us anything. Anything at all. You  
can't turn me away.

Stella picks up an expensive glass lampshade from the mahogany side table. Without a word, she hurls it at his feet.

It shatters against the marble hearth with a violent, deafening crash. A jagged mess of glass on a pristine floor.

STELLA  
You see? I want nothing. You cannot  
buy me anything more. You cannot tell  
me who to be.

Paolo stares at the broken glass. He desperately steps forwards, grabbing her brutally by the arms.

PAOLO  
Forgive me. You are young, and you are  
the greatest dancer in the world. But  
you are mine. Give me another chance.

STELLA  
Let go of me! You are suffocating me.  
And you smell of decay, it's your age,  
Paolo! Let go or I'll scream!

INT. 5TH FLOOR CORRIDOR - NIGHT

William is pressed flat against the wall outside Room 512. Inside, a PIERCING SHRILL rips through the walls. Stella.

The brass handle of 512 violently turns. William panics. He dives head-first towards the emergency stairwell.

He throws his weight against the heavy door just as Paolo bursts into the corridor.

INT. EMERGENCY STAIRWELL - NIGHT

William collapses into the concrete shadows of the landing, holding his breath, his heart hammering against his ribs.

Through the small, wire-meshed window of the fire door, he sees Paolo stop in the corridor. Paolo's eyes lock in his direction.

Paolo approaches the glass. William presses himself flat against the concrete wall, completely trapped.

Paolo stares into the dim stairwell. He sees the rough outline of a figure in the shadows. His jaw tightens...

But rather than cause a scene, he adjusts his bespoke cuffs, turns on his heel, and strides away.

INT. 5TH FLOOR CORRIDOR - NIGHT

The corridor is dead silent. William emerges from the stairwell. He approaches Room 512. The door is slightly ajar.

He knocks gently. Stella appears in the gap. Her mascara smudged. She looks exhausted, a captive bird rattling the bars.

STELLA

Who are you?

WILLIAM

(adopting a terribly polite tone)

I... I am so sorry to intrude. I am in the suite next door. 514. I heard the glass, and the screaming... I just wanted to ensure you were quite alright.

Stella sizes him up. He is soaking wet, wearing a frayed tweed suit, and looking at her with an almost frightened reverence.

He is entirely unthreatening. She steps back, leaving the door open. A taciturn invitation.

INT. ROSEWOOD BEDROOM (ROOM 512) - NIGHT

William steps into the suite. Stella collapses into a deep wingback armchair, pulling her knees to her chest.

William carefully avoids the shattered glass on the marble and looks to the wet bar.

WILLIAM

Can I finish making that drink for you?

STELLA

Martini. Please.

He is clumsy with the silver cocktail shaker.

WILLIAM

Do you mind my asking what happened? I am gravely concerned for a woman in such distress.

William hands Stella the glass and she talks.

WILLIAM (V.O.)

I handed her the glass, and she handed me the truth of her life. She told me the entire story of Paolo. How she was essentially betrothed to him by her late father to settle a debt of ambition. How the two men were excellent businessmen, but terrible at family, at love, at understanding the human heart.

TIME CUT. The cocktail glasses are empty. The heavy rain lashes against the sash windows. An intimacy has settled over the room.

STELLA

I must sleep now. You have been very kind to listen to a stranger's hysterics.

WILLIAM

You have been very brave to share them. May you rest well.

William stands, moving towards the door. He hesitates, his hand on the brass knob. He cannot let her slip back into the dark.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

I... I don't suppose I could see you tomorrow?

Stella looks up from the armchair. A genuine smile surfaces.

STELLA

Breakfast?

WILLIAM

I should like nothing better. At what time?

STELLA

That depends entirely on how I sleep. I am a ballet dancer, my life is ruled by schedules. But tomorrow, I wake naturally.

WILLIAM  
(smiling back)  
Naturally. Goodnight, Stella.

He opens the door.

STELLA  
What did you say your room number was?

WILLIAM  
514.

He steps out, pulling the door softly shut behind him.

INT. 5TH FLOOR CORRIDOR - NIGHT

William walks softly down the corridor towards Room 514. He stops at the mahogany door and bites his lip.

He runs a hand through his hair, acutely aware of the lie he has just spun. He turns and pushes through the fire doors.

EXT. ROSEWOOD HOTEL - NIGHT

William slips out, collar turned up, walking swiftly away from the Edwardian palace and into the dark, wet streets of the city.

INT. WILLIAM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

William's reality in West London. The apartment is tiny and ascetically bare. A bed, stack of vinyl records, a small stereo.

Two suitcases sit by the door, meticulously packed and organised for his impending flight to New York.

William lies on top of the bedsheets, still fully clothed in his damp suit, thrilled and terrified by the night's events.

He stares at the ceiling, crosses himself, and reaches for the bedside lamp.

WILLIAM  
Please forgive me, God... May it be  
your will.

He clicks the lamp off.

EXT. ROSEWOOD HOTEL - DAY

Bright and early. The morning sun rises in the east, striking the terracotta roof of the grand hotel with a warm clarity.

INT. ROSEWOOD HOTEL (DINING ROOM) - DAY

A cavernous room, polished silver, white linen, immense wealth. William sits alone at a corner table. Intensely alert, watching.

WILLIAM (V.O.)

Breakfast in the hotel dining room began at six o'clock in the morning, and lasted right the way through until ten. I ended up sitting there for two hours. She did not appear until eight, but I was not prepared to leave a single minute up to chance.

Stella appears in the grand archway. She is wearing a flowing silk nightgown, utterly disregarding formal dress codes.

She is softly humming Tchaikovsky's *Tempo di valse*. William stands immediately.

WILLIAM

Good morning.

STELLA

I am sorry. I tried to call your room, but the lobby boy told me the guest in 514 had left at the crack of dawn. I worried you had changed your mind.

WILLIAM

(a smooth recovery)

Oh, please don't worry. I often go out for early walks. To clear the mind.

STELLA

Did you have a problem with the plumbing in your bathroom?

WILLIAM

No. Why?

STELLA

It kept running out of flush. I'm sorry, it's just that I often have to get up in the night. Excuse me for looking so awful at this early hour.

WILLIAM (V.O.)

At that moment, I could only think about how impossibly beautiful she looked. How calm and natural, and entirely unshielded of make-up. How elegant the line of her neck was. Her eyes were so large and dark, I could imagine falling into them and never dreaming of anything else.

Stella settles into eating 2 delicate slices of watermelon. William attacks a Full-English breakfast with nervous energy.

Stella sips her green tea. She reaches into the pocket of her robe and displays a creased, black-and-white photograph.

She tenderly places it on the white linen tablecloth.

STELLA

Look. This is my family in Italy. This is my sister, Sandra, and this is my father. Sandra was a very good ballet dancer. Everyone said so...

She trails off. A sorrow crosses her face.

STELLA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

WILLIAM

No, please. I would love to hear more about you. And where you come from.

STELLA

Do you really want to hear about it? About my family?

WILLIAM

Yes, of course.

STELLA

From the very beginning?

WILLIAM

Yes.

INT. THEATRE STAGE - DAY (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Stark, high-contrast BLACK AND WHITE. Stella's voiceover plays over a surreal, silent montage.

On a dark stage, a young dancer (SANDRA) performs elongated, classical movements. Beautiful, but it feels like a haunting.

STELLA (V.O.)

Sandra was the favourite. She adored our father. She was six years old before I was even born, and already on the stage. Father was a businessman, but all he ever really cared for was ballet and red wine. He made a fortune at both. Mother was more intelligent. And very beautiful. I think that was when they were most happy...

Sandra on stage spins. We glance the figure of a strong man (THE FATHER) watching from the wings, holding a glass of wine.

STELLA (V.O.)

Then I was born. My mother died in childbirth. Sandra became the spitting image of her, as if she grew more beautiful with each passing day that mother was gone. I was jealous. She was perfect. Father even agreed. And by then, she was dancing with the Scala...

Sandra is suddenly partnered with a faceless man in a sharp suit (THE HUSBAND). Her movements become increasingly constrained.

STELLA (V.O.)

But then she decided to marry. The man wasn't handsome, but he was very rich, and Father liked him. So they wed, and that was the end of her career. I'll never know why she gave up the stage to be his wife. She didn't love him. Perhaps it was because of Father's illness.

The father in the wings collapses. The dancer drops to her knees, reaching for him.

STELLA (V.O.)

He died two years later. Sandra had spent a fortune looking after him. They were closer than ever, and I probably hated her even more for it. I was dancing professionally by then... perhaps Father was more focused on staying alive than taking an interest in me.

The stage is empty. Just a single spotlight hitting the wooden floorboards.

STELLA (V.O.)

Sandra called to say he was dead. She told me it was cancer, but I never truly believed it. I went to stay with them. Her husband was sweet to me, but showed little empathy. Sandra kept smiling... I wasn't sure who she loved, or if she ever truly loved mother or father.

A phonograph appears in the spotlight. The record is spinning.

STELLA (V.O.)

A few days later, I went to check on her. The house was awfully quiet. Tchaikovsky's Tempo di valse was playing from her room. Very loudly. I went in...

We see Sandra lying on the stage floorboards. She is dressed in her pristine, white-feathered tutu.

But a dark pool of black blood spreads from her wrists, staining the pure white feathers.

STELLA (V.O.)

I found her on the floor. Her wrists cut. I didn't scream. But my insides burnt. I whispered to her that I loved her. That I would make her proud. That I would live forever, and become the greatest dancer that had ever been. And that I would never, ever make a compromise for anybody else, like she had to.

INT. ROSEWOOD HOTEL (DINING ROOM) - DAY

Right back to vibrant colour, and the gentle clinking of silver cutlery brings us back to reality.

William sits perfectly still, staring at her, completely shell-shocked, completely absorbed and moved by her life story.

Stella looks down at her tea. Tears bulge in her large, brown eyes. Despite the tragedy, she still looks perfectly beautiful.

William gently pushes his plate aside. He leans forwards.

WILLIAM

I am so, so sorry.

Stella wipes her eye with the back of her hand, struggling to maintain her composure.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Would you like to go out for a walk?

STELLA

Where?

WILLIAM

St. James's Park. It is the most beautiful time of year to see the leaves turn.

EXT. ST JAMES'S PARK - DAY

A crisp, bright autumn day. The trees lining the lake are burning in shades of copper and gold.

Stella and William walk arm-in-arm. She is doing most of the talking, her hands moving with fluid, expressive grace.

WILLIAM (V.O.)

I knew there was no going back, and she did too. Not after laying her soul so bare. She finally asked about me, and I told her my life was dull, devoid of trauma. I was simply leaving for New York on Monday to start an associate professorship at Columbia. And that was it. She liked me. And I... I already loved her with a ferocity I had never known.

STELLA

I want to come with you.

William stops walking, stunned by the suddenness of it.

STELLA (CONT'D)

I will join the New York City Ballet. They are far more exciting over there. I can dance Balanchine and Stravinsky at last!

WILLIAM

But you are a classical dancer. You are perfect as you are.

STELLA

No! I am so tired of classical restraint.

(MORE)

STELLA (CONT'D)

Don't you think it is more thrilling to be romantic? To be adventurous?'

WILLIAM

I have always found the classical fairy tales to be rather romantic by nature.

STELLA

But they are false! A swan dying for a prince... It is an old illusion. Real emotion is found in the neo-classical. Progressive choreography breaking the old rules. Do you not think so?

WILLIAM

Then I fear I am too much in love with the past.

STELLA

Do you not think one hundred years in the past is quite long enough to be trapped?

William smiles, conceding the point.

STELLA (CONT'D)

I am joking. I do not know history like you do. I am only a ballerina.

WILLIAM

You are the most beautiful and talented ballerina the world has ever seen.

Stella smiles, but a flick of anxiety crosses her eyes. She looks over her shoulder on reflex, scanning the park.

INT. BROMPTON ORATORY - DAY

The vast, cavernous interior of the neo-classical Roman Catholic church. Quiet, in the incense-scented lull between services.

William and Stella sit together in a wooden pew, near the grand, fortified chancel.

WILLIAM (V.O.)

We were both Catholics, though perhaps mostly for our families' sake. She told me her reasoning for faith was simple. Without an appetite for the supernatural, human beings would have very little character at all.

(MORE)

WILLIAM (V.O.) (CONT'D)

We would be merely material. She said her dancing was inspired by God. I told her that made sense, because God is music to my ears.

Stella reaches out, taking William's hand. She brushes her thumb tenderly across his knuckles.

STELLA

Why do you believe in God?

WILLIAM

I suppose... Because I feel that He believes in me.

Stella laughs softly, chiming. She leans her head against William's shoulder. They gaze up at the high, vaulted dome.

STELLA

Me too.

Deep in the shadows at the back of the nave, near the heavy oak doors, a MAN stands perfectly still, in a sharp, dark suit.

He is watching them. He raises a mobile phone to his ear, his eyes never leaving the back of Stella's head.

EXT. ROSEWOOD HOTEL - DAY

William and Stella return to the grand Edwardian courtyard, moving briskly, holding hands.

INT. ROSEWOOD BEDROOM (ROOM 512) - DAY

The drapes are pulled back, flooding the suite with afternoon light. Stella kicks off her shoes.

She moves to the centre of the room and performs a sudden, joyful grand jeté. A leap of pure freedom.

She turns, laughing, and gestures for William to join her.

WILLIAM

Oh, no. Absolutely not. My talent in life is... Purely academic.

STELLA

Come on! It is just movement!

William steps forwards. He attempts a clumsy, overly formal bow, followed by an incredibly stiff, uncoordinated spin.

He trips over his own feet, stumbling. Stella catches him. The laughter dies down as their bodies collide.

She looks up at him. The playfulness vanishes. William brings a hand up to touch her cheek.

He leans down, and they kiss. A searching kiss, wrapping them together as they fall back onto the immaculate bed.

WILLIAM (V.O.)

We kissed, and for a brief moment, the illusion was complete. She agreed to come to New York. She would abandon the White Swan, she would abandon Paolo, and she would disappear with me.

EXT. ROSEWOOD HOTEL - DAWN

The city is swallowed in a thick, pale mist. The street-lamps still glow with a dull orange halo.

William and Stella emerge from the iron gates of the hotel, moving quickly.

EXT. HOLBORN STREET - DAWN

William raises a hand to hail a distant, approaching cab.

A sleek, black saloon car suddenly accelerates from the shadows. Its tyres screech against the wet tarmac.

It cuts across the lane, mounting the curb and blocking their path down a narrow side street.

The driver's door opens. Paolo steps out into the mist. He looks speckless, cold, utterly lethal. But Stella does not hesitate.

She turns and runs. William catches up to her, grabs her hand, and they flee on foot.

EXT. COVENT GARDEN ALLEYWAYS - DAWN

They dart through the labyrinth of Covent Garden. The narrow, cobbled alleyways are empty and slick with morning rain.

Paolo pursues them, his footsteps echo against the brickwork. The march of a man who knows the terrain.

William and Stella turn down Maiden Lane. Looming out of the grey is the unassuming brick facade of Corpus Christi Church.

William pushes the stiff door. It gives way.

INT. CORPUS CHRISTI CHURCH - DAY

They spill into the vestibule. The interior is in contrast to the Oratory, a tight, vertical, intimate gothic-revival space.

The church is open for early Matins. A few solitary parishioners kneel in the shadowy gloom.

At the altar, a small choir chants a low, mournful psalm in Latin. William pulls Stella behind a thick side aisle pillar.

They are both panting, chests heaving. The church doors creak open.

Paolo enters. He does not cross himself. He reaches beneath his tailored coat and draws a pistol equipped with a suppressor.

He stalks down the central aisle, completely indifferent to the divinity around him, his eyes scanning the shadowed alcoves.

William looks at Stella. He gives her a silent nod. Stay here. It's final. He steps out from hiding, showing himself.

WILLIAM

Paolo!

Paolo snaps his gaze over and raises the pistol, moving swiftly into a narrow side chapel after William.

He backs up against a stone effigy.

PAOLO

You are out of your depth, boy. Where is she?

WILLIAM

She's gone. Free of you.

Paolo sneers, raising the barrel of the gun squarely at William's chest. Then Stella steps out.

She grips a solid brass paterissa. A bishop's CROSIER, left resting against the sacristy wall.

With the absolute physical control of a principal dancer, she swings the heavy brass hook in a flawless, devastating arc.

The solid brass collides with the back of Paolo's SKULL.

PAOLO DROPS LIKE A STONE.

Hitting the flagstones. The suppressed pistol clatters across the floor.

But the violence of the strike is instantly swallowed by the soaring CRESCENDO OF THE CHOIR at the main altar.

Stella stands over him, trembling. She drops the crosier. It rings out against the stone.

She looks at William, her breathing slowing.

INT. PADDINGTON STATION - DAY

The sun has finally burned through the mist, filling the epic glass-and-iron vault of the station with blinding light.

William stands anxiously at the platform barrier. The sleek purple carriages of the Heathrow Express hiss and hum.

The departure clock ticks down. 08:55.

He paces the platform, his attire rumpled, his knuckles gripping his satchel. He scans the sea of morning commuters.

WILLIAM (V.O.)

I feared I had lost her to the police interrogations, or worse, to the relentless trappings of her past. Standing there, I began to wonder if the entire night was a fever dream. A mere phantom conjured by a musicologist who had spent too much time alone in the dark listening to Wagner.

08:58.

The whistle blows. A guard gestures for William to board.

Suddenly, the crowd parts.

Stella appears.

No more wearing a tightly tailored classical bun of Paolo's making, but a loose trench coat, her dark hair falling freely.

She looks breathless, terrified, and radiantly free. She runs to him. William drops his satchel.

They collide in a crushing embrace as the station announcements echo around them.

WILLIAM (V.O.)

But she was real. The Orphic rescue was complete. I had looked back into the underworld, and she had followed me out into the light.

They break apart and board the train together.

The doors slide shut, sealing them inside.

As the train glides out of the station, we linger on the empty platform.

And the final notes of Schubert's *Impromptu* play adoringly over the credits...