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TROUVER MARIE

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EXT. MARIE'S APARTMENT - DAY

A clean apartment in Bloomsbury within a mansion block.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - DAY

High Victorian ceilings, tall windows, classical furnishings, and the lingering scent of Earl Grey tea and expensive inks.

MARIE (62, French) sits at a mahogany desk. Her hair appears almost golden, but the texture betrays the chemistry.

She is signing copies of a slim volume, her own, titled TROUVER MARIE.

She hears a brass knock at the door. She turns the top book on her stack face-down. One for privacy, not ashamed.

She opens the hallway door to MICHAEL (62).

He enters. A man whose spectacles and tailored clothes suggest a respectable London life, albeit as a therapist.

MARIE

Michael. You're early.

MICHAEL

And you're looking very industrious.

He offers a parcel wrapped in cream paper and twine.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Hot off the press, my dear. The first edition of my studies in 'anxious attachment'. Though I suspect you'll find the prose rather prosaic.

Marie takes it. She sets it atop a stack of *Le Monde*.

MARIE

Tea? Or is your afternoon diary already full?

MICHAEL

For you, the clock stops.

EXT. GOWER STREET - DAY

Through the window, we see a torrent of UCL STUDENTS. Gen-Z vibrancy, puffered jackets, 3D printed garments, etc.

They move with the confidence of those who believe they invented freedom, desire, and laughter.

MARIE (V.O.)
Look at them. They think they are
the first to ever live, to ever
walk towards the *précipice*.

INT. MARIE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Marie watches the murky tea leaves settle at the bottom of
her cup like dark-brown sediment.

MARIE
I was 42 when I met him, the man I
loved terribly, with all my heart.
His name was- *Dante*.

MICHAEL
The Austrian. The same one who
borrowed his name from the Pre-
Raphaelites, as it were.

MARIE
Dante Gabriel Steiner.

Michael heartily chuckles. But Marie is not laughing.

MARIE (CONT'D)
He didn't just take the name, he
inhabited the ghost of a madman.

MICHAEL
Rossetti was noted for his
eccentrics.

MARIE
No, the ghost of any madman. I
don't care to know which.

EXT. ST. JAMES'S PARK - DAY (20 YEARS AGO)

The palette shifts into a saturated, autumnal gold.

DANTE (24), dressed in black, leans against the grass. He
attacks his sketchbook with watercolours, mid-flow.

MARIE (42) radiant, still treading the fine line between
maturity and youth, lies beside him.

She reaches out, her fingers resting by the nape of his neck.
A tender touch, it could be both maternal and seductive.

MARIE (V.O.)
He was a genius at painting, or so
the Vatican thought.

Dante paints the trees before them.

His depiction is in the expressionists style, but distinct in his contrast of horror, the sublime, and modern Gothic.

INT. MARIE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Michael settles into a velvet armchair. He watches Marie with a professional's eye, looking for clues.

MICHAEL

You never did finish telling me about him. You last stopped at the part where he leaves for Berlin.

MARIE

Because the Muse is required to never disclose the full truth. Not until the artist is dead.

Marie grips the cool edge of her oak desk, grounding herself.

MARIE (CONT'D)

Mais j'en ai assez d'être une simple note de bas de page dans la raison d'un homme.
(But I'm tired of being a footnote in a man's story.)

MICHAEL

(leaning in)
How long is the truth?

MARIE

Well, Michael, the book took me 20 years to write.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY (20 YEARS AGO)

A suffocatingly white room, a suite of cold marble that feels starch.

Outside, Big Ben chimes throughout Westminster. And sunshine streams in through the curtains.

ROGER (46) adjusts a silk tie in the mirror. On the neat desk before him is a folder embossed with the Royal Coat of Arms.

MARIE (42, a different actress) enters.

She moves slowly in her morning dress, as if the air had an unwelcome density to it. She goes straight to the window.

ROGER

Justice, Marie. Today I become the Minister of Justice.
(MORE)

ROGER (CONT'D)

Don't you know that this is the beginning of our future? Our special future together.

He looks at her back through the reflection of his mirror. Marie pours herself a glass of juice. The liquid sloshes.

Then she goes back to the window, most comfortable there.

ROGER (CONT'D)

You look- most beautiful this morning. A significant woman. May I call you darling?

MARIE

You may call me merely anything you want to, if it helps you finish your tie, Roger.

ROGER

Well, don't be provocative. You are about to become the wife of a Minster. In England, that carries the weight of a title - it means a great deal.

Roger finishes doing his attire. He is a little feeble man really, and without much height.

MARIE

And when are we to be marooned in the Manor house?

ROGER

(a thin smile)

Once the property is settled. It will be nice and quiet. Somewhere we can be happy, in the most civic sense.

Marie becomes frightfully still. Roger 'prepares' documents on his desk.

MARIE

I'm going to the opera. Rossini. The Barber of Seville.

ROGER

Comic opera? I've never understood the need to make light of the dramatic form. It's queer. Just don't be late for the state banquet. You've been cordially invited by the Crown.

MARIE (V.O.)

Roger was the 'best choice'. A man of laws, of categorical imperatives. But I wasn't looking for a theory of a man.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

You were looking for thunder, like Dante.

MARIE (V.O.)

No, I had no mind of what I was searching for. But I did know what was tasteless to me.

EXT./INT. LONDON - MONTAGE

ST. PANCRAS - MARIE (32, *same actress a decade younger*), smiling, long eyelashes.

She looks up at the red-brick Neo-Gothic spires, inspired.

MARIE (V.O.)

I arrived in London years before I met Roger. I mistook the Victorian spirit for passion.

TRAFALGAR SQUARE - Marie outside the National Gallery.

She ponders the view beyond Nelson's column down towards Parliament Rd.

MARIE (V.O.)

But even so London was more beautiful to me than Paris. There is something about it here I can't fathom.

GOWER STREET - BENJAMIN (40s), a man of inheritance and pathetic charm, hands her a key for the apartment.

MARIE'S APARTMENT - She goes straight to the window, with a view onto Gower St below.

MARIE (V.O.)

Benjamin. Or Benedict. Or *Benedictus*. A landlord, very British, polite- a loser. Even so I had to experience a British man in bed.

COVENT GARDEN - A wine glass rebounds the lights of the Piazza.

Benjamin watches Marie's lips pressing against the glass, completely enamoured with her.

Then he leans into kiss her. Marie looks over his shoulder at a street performer, a contortionist in considerable pain.

MARIE (V.O.)

He treated the bedroom like a library. Quiet, respectful, utterly unexciting.

INT. MARIE'S APARTMENT - DAY (PRESENT)

Back to the murky brown tea. Michael laughs dryly.

MICHAEL

We aren't all prudes, some of us are merely restrained, for class effect.

MARIE

Roger was the worst, a sexual desert.

MICHAEL

Well, he's a Stoic.

MARIE

No, not even. He was just empty.

MICHAEL

Barren of a soul.

MARIE

You know my thoughts.

MICHAEL

I have read your drafts.

Marie smirks.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Now tell me about 'the rain'.

MARIE

No, I love the rain. It washes. Dante is more fire. An all-consuming fire.

EXT. ROYAL OPERA HOUSE - DAY (20 YEARS AGO)

The Baroque revival frontage of Bow Street is bathed in sunlight. Marie walks past Plazzotta's 'Young Dancer' statue.

She doesn't even glance at the doors.

MARIE (V.O.)

Roger knew I wasn't going to the opera that afternoon.

(MORE)

MARIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I was seeking more than Rossini's
comfortable wit.

EXT./INT. BROMPTON ORATORY - DAY

The Neo-Gothic gloom of the Oratory swallows Marie as she enters the portico. A poster leans against a marble pillar.

THE PLAGUE CHRIST. The image is a jagged, expressionist smear of a body not just painfully crucified but rotting.

It is very bold for Roman Catholic taste. The artist's name, DANTE. Marie stares at the advertisement.

It also features Dante's headshot.

Inside, the air is thick with incense and beeswax. A DEVOTED WOMAN prays, her face shrouded in a black mantilla.

Marie walks down the nave. Then she spots him.

DANTE (24) kneels, staring at the altar. He is not in prayer, something else, like a trance.

The Sacristy door slams, the echo cracking through the silence. A PRIEST jumps, looking a bit foolish.

Then he turns to his ALTAR-BOY with eyes of blame. Marie lets out an involuntary laugh.

Dante glides towards her, one pew over.

DANTE
(Austrian lilt very soft)
Careful, Madama. Laughing in this
house is a one-way ticket to a
boring Purgatory. Do you believe in
the 'immaculate' story of the
Virgin?

MARIE
No.

DANTE
What do you believe in? The beauty
of the architecture perhaps?

MARIE
(nods)
And what do you believe?

DANTE
I just believe that He believes in
me. If He didn't, then I wouldn't
know how to paint - the canvas
wouldn't argue with me. I'm Dante.
(MORE)

DANTE (CONT'D)

The Vatican pays for most of my canvases. Don't tell anybody, but I'm not a genius from Florence, I'm just a brat from Salzburg- What's your name? Are you French?

MARIE

Oui, Marie.

DANTE

Enchanté.

PRIEST 2 stands half-way down an aisle in shadows, but his eagle-frown is clear, and it's directed at Marie and Dante.

INT. MARIE'S APARTMENT - DAY (20 YEARS AGO)

More rugged. The room is a wreck of books and half-drunk wine. A red the colour of arterial blood swirls in 2 glasses.

Marie and Dante are cosy on a small corner sofa.

MARIE

Your first love. Tell me.

Forget words, Dante grabs a charcoal stick. With precise strokes, he violently scratches an image into a sketchbook.

A girl with hollowed-out eyes, like cathedral arches, and yet she is startlingly life-like. It takes seconds to do.

He then rips the page out and hands it to an amused Marie.

DANTE

Imogen. A Christian. She thought love was a form of self-immolation. She was right of course, but lacked the craft.

He flips the page and draws a contorted Christ on the Cross. More intimate than the one on the poster.

DANTE (CONT'D)

My second love. The Man on the Tree.

Marie is stunned by the passion and dexterity of this work.

EXT./INT. MONASTERY - FLASHBACK MONTAGE

THE ABBEY - a beautiful medieval cloister in Cîteaux, France.

MARIE (V.O.)

Are you serious?

DANTE (V.O.)
About Christ Jesus, Son of God?
Yes. But I felt let down.

THE GRAVEYARD - A younger DANTE (19), hooded like a monk, touching a gold-plated headstone.

As he admires the Abbey's graveyard.

MARIE (V.O.)
Why?

DANTE (V.O.)
When I fled to become a monk, I realised I didn't have it in me.

ABBEY CHURCH - Dante, angst-ridden, looks up at a large hanging wooden cross of Christ crucified.

With all the blood and nails.

MARIE (V.O.)
What?

DANTE (V.O.)
The true and necessary faith.

Dante crosses himself but his heart isn't in it.

THE DINING HALL - A line of monks eating in total silence. Except for the excruciating clatter of metal forks.

Dante struggles to keep up. He looks resigned.

INT. MARIE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Back to the red wine. Dante tosses the sketchbook aside and turns to Marie with an artist's intensity.

DANTE
My mother said if I became a monk, I'd be Pope. And that if I became an artist, I'd be madder than Picasso.

MARIE
She wasn't wrong.

Marie lovingly traces the line of his jaw.

MARIE (CONT'D)
She was describing the same thing.

DANTE
Enlighten me.

MARIE

The Pope and the Painter both claim
to own the light.

Dante's hand covers hers. The charcoal dust marks her skin,
but she embraces it.

DANTE

And what about a writer - what does
she possess?

MARIE

Les conséquences.

Dante laughs hard. Marie lights a cigarette, her own.

DANTE

Enough about my stupid self.

MARIE

But my life is boring.

Dante stares at a photograph on the mantelpiece. An old image
of a girl in a tutu.

DANTE

Who is the dancer?

MARIE

Florence. My sister. She spent her
life trying to be a swan, and then
when the Opéra director said she
was only a woman - and some other
misogynistic insults - my sister is
very sensitive - she cut her
wrists.

DANTE

Did she live?

MARIE

She died alone dancing the black
swan. No, she lived! But she's a
major depressive in Paris.

Smoke lingers like a shroud over Marie. She aggressively
stubs out her cigarette.

Dante listens closely to everything Marie says.

MARIE (CONT'D)

It was in my apartment. I didn't
scream. I just realised that it's
my own family's fault - you aren't
anything if you aren't great at
something. So I came to London.

(MORE)

MARIE (CONT'D)

*Qu'elle soit plutôt une note de bas
de page. Pourquoi pas ?*
(Why not be a footnote instead?)

Dante just stares into Marie's eyes.

And seconds later, they are kissing and throwing down their clothes over his canvases.

MARIE (V.O.)

Perhaps it was just down to timing,
but we were both desperate for a
way- to connect- to escape-
whatever the reason, all I could
think of was how much I wanted him.

LATER (POST-COITAL). The BT Tower looms like a cold sentinel beyond the window, towering over Fitzrovia.

Dante flips a canvas. It's a portrait of Marie, but her skin is the colour of slate and ash.

And yet it still looks beautiful.

She sits upright in her bed, smoking a cigarette, everything loose. But she's not so sure about the painting.

MARIE

Am I supposed to be dead?

DANTE

You are mortal. It's my black phase.

MARIE

That isn't a phase.

DANTE

It is now.

He moves to the bed, kissing her.

DANTE (CONT'D)

I am caught in the Devil's snare.

MARIE

Then I must be the demon.

Dante grins, perhaps.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Marie twirls to Schubert's *Impromptu No. 2*.

She could have been a dancer like her sister. She tries to pull an unyielding Dante into the dance.

Then the BUZZER ruptures the beauty. Marie runs to the door.
Moments later, she returns breathless. Dante sits on the bed.

MARIE
My ex is downstairs.

DANTE
How many are there?

MARIE
Jean, the one from Paris.

DANTE
Another damn politician.

MARIE
He's gone. I told him I have a
lover in my bed.

DANTE
Honesty to kill a man. I love you.

Dante rises, finishes dressing.

DANTE (CONT'D)
I can't stay tonight.

MARIE
Why?

DANTE
There's a party I must get to. I
wish my life had far less idle
youths in it. They should all be
sacked for insolence!

MARIE
You aren't dating some young
Goddess at this party?

DANTE
No!

MARIE
Come to the country with me. I have
money.

DANTE
No, not the provinces.

MARIE
You have another lover.

DANTE
I'm not the one running.

MARIE
I told you about my fiancé.

DANTE
The Statesman.

MARIE
I'm leaving him, tonight. I've
already decided.

DANTE
Why?

Marie glares at him, isn't it obvious?

MARIE
You have another lover.

DANTE
No, I have another mission.

MARIE
Stay in my luxury hotel tonight.

DANTE
I hope you have a nice banquet,
Marie.

Dante leaves the canvases leaning against the hall. A series
of 'black ghosts'.

INT. MARIE'S APARTMENT - DAY (PRESENT)

MICHAEL
He left you then - that was it?

MARIE
No. But he left me in that moment
with the realisation that to an
artist every person is an object to
study, and only then becomes a
subject. And that subject is
shrouded in so many layers of grey
we never really know them.

MICHAEL
They weren't masterpieces then.

MARIE
No, they were.

MICHAEL
Because of you.

MARIE
No.

MICHAEL

Now you're the one signing books.
He lives in obscurity.

MARIE

No, Michael. I am just a blip to him. My talent is nothing like a real artist. And don't even dare to contradict me. I finally accepted my self-critical nature, a long time ago.

She looks at her cold tea, it appears almost black.

INT. BAROQUE HALL - NIGHT (20 YEARS AGO)

A high state interior, white marble archways, floor-to-ceiling windows.

The QUEEN, a steady anchor in this sea of new Parliamentary egos, offers her glove to each.

Then it's Roger's turn to kiss the 'holy relic'.

ROGER

We've evolved far beyond Dickens now, Your Majesty. The justice of the prisoner is a humanitarian effort.

The Queen offers a little smile that is a triumph of regal opacity.

Behind them, a string quartet plays one of Bach's *four-part chorales*. A trifle mournful for such an occasion.

LATER. The hall has morphed into a dining room.

The female PRIME MINISTER, who looks like she hasn't seen an REM cycle in a decade, addresses the Ministers.

We briefly see Marie, sat at the far end of a random table, nowhere close to Roger.

PRIME MINISTER

To celebrate our enduring democracy, a voice from the academy. A poet for our time, here especially to share his brilliance with us this evening.

A CAMBRIDGE POET (20), with perfectly parted hair, stands. He reads from a velum sheet.

YOUNG POET

Great Britain is no mere map / But
 a garden where good strangers nap /
 We are created neighbours by the
 labor of our favour / Our democracy
 is rewarded by just and generous
 behaviour / Educated by liberal
 pride, civil and justified...

Marie, her eyes glazed over, feels a literal heave in her stomach. Nauseating. She rises and slips out.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

A large Neo-Baroque corridor. Marie sinks into an armchair.

JEAN (54), a man trapped in a tight collar, red-nosed, approaches. He spotted her leaving the hall.

JEAN

Marie. Are you not feeling well?

MARIE

This country has forgotten how to bleed.

JEAN

D'accord, Jeanne d'Arc.

MARIE

It's only a stomach sickness. But the poetry was awful.

JEAN

(sitting, too close)
 I can get you water. I know how unpleasant it can be. Just remember the vineyards. The good times when we would talk at sunset. I've learned a lot about myself, Marie.

The LOBBY BOY appears. Jean orders him.

It is clear from deeply nostalgic way Jean looks at Marie that he really did love her in the past. They sit quietly.

JEAN (CONT'D)

I've learned that I'm just a lonely man with money. Money I can't buy you with.

MARIE

I'm glad you are soul-searching, Jean. But I don't think it is helping you to confess that you aren't finding much there.

(MORE)

MARIE (CONT'D)

I don't want your care, I'd rather
feel ill.

Marie takes the glass of water from the Lobby Boy. Perfect timing. But she doesn't drink it, she gives it Jean.

MARIE (CONT'D)

(to the Boy)

Take me back my room.

They leave. Jean stays put, alone. He's out of steam, feeling too shunned by Marie's spite and total lack of attention.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Marie stands by the window. The tall curtains frame her like a triptych, shaded from the moonlight.

Roger bursts in, smelling like lamb and brandy.

ROGER

I hoped you might have the decency
to come back down for some dinner.
Marie. Listen to me. You weren't at
the opera house. I checked. Where
were you?

MARIE

I was in Church, Roger.

ROGER

What the hell were you doing there?
(takes a breath,
recollects calm)
We have a future, a great place in
the hierarchy. But you must act
like you respect it.

MARIE

I'm not marrying you.

ROGER

(the calm snaps)
Who is he? Some penniless artist?

MARIE

(nods)
An artist.

Roger grabs a glass lampshade, a delicate, hand-blown thing. He smashes it on the marbled floor.

It obliterates. Shards of glass scatter across the carpet like diamonds in the ruins.

Marie, startled by his violence, runs out of the room, almost stepping on a 'crystal'.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

Marie descends the stairs. Jean is still there, empty on the sofa, a statue of regret.

JEAN

Marie. I'm still in love with you.
I despise the greed that took me
from you. You are the only person
who can see me for what I am.

MARIE

And I despise the man you are.
Goodbye.

JEAN

Don't you remember how you loved
me?

She's gone. Roger appears at the top of the stairs, catching the tail end of Marie.

Then he sees Jean, a political ally, and must act the diplomatic part.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Roger. Marvellous poem, wasn't it?
Long live our liberal union.

ROGER

(gritting his teeth)
Certainly, dignified. Wholly
dignified, but- Excuse us, Jean.

Roger catches up to Marie in the corridor. The Lobby Boy passes by with water.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Where do you plan on going?

MARIE

I'm going back to Bloomsbury.

ROGER

I cancelled the lease.

MARIE

I have the keys. It's mine now
anyway.

Roger lets her go, swallowing his pride.

INT. MARIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Marie is in the BATHTUB, submerged in foam.

A Schumann string quartet plays, similar in tone to the Bach but modern. It sounds more like a requiem.

In the BEDROOM, the floor is a battleground of discarded sketches and paint-crusted sheets.

Marie stands before her MIRROR, drying herself. She puts ointment on her skin, refreshing sunken eyes.

She studies her reflection, the lineaments of her body hold their shape. She knows her worth, even if it's being wasted.

At the window, a shadow pauses under a streetlight. Dante.

Marie doesn't hesitate. She presses the buzzer, then climbs into bed, damp and waiting.

Dante enters. No words, just his presence and a kiss that tastes like an apology. He slides under the covers with her.

EXT. CORNISH BAY - DAY

From the London grey to the brilliant azure of Cornwall. A narrow bay, jagged cliffs, the hushed roar of the Atlantic.

Dante stands at an easel on the cliff's edge. He is dissecting the light in an impressionist, novel way.

It's a completely different style to the portraits, and yet the same artist.

MARIE (V.O.)

We escaped to Cornwall, the edge of the small Isle that felt like the edge of the world. I knew he had affairs, but I gave up minding. I thought I could nurture the genius out of him. Love became a kind of patronage. I found him impossible not to love.

INT. MARIE'S APARTMENT - DAY (PRESENT)

MICHAEL

You wanted to be the Medici to his Michelangelo.

MARIE

I wanted to be the order to his chaos, but you can't go on loving somebody for the sake of art.

MICHAEL

But that's your fantasy. The old aesthetic trap. 'Art for the sake of art.'

MARIE
I suppose you're right.

MICHAEL
A genius for the sake of a genius.
It's the only way to be one.

MARIE
Or a devil for the sake of the
devil.

Michael smirks, in agreement.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

The light is dying. Dante is painting Marie, but he keeps looking past her, eyes fixed on the sublime sea horizon.

There's barely a brushstroke on the canvas. Marie watches him. She sees that he is losing interest in her.

It silently breaks her heart.

MARIE (V.O.)
The landowner came for the keys.
The dream was a rental, after all.

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

A seagull screams, soaring over the cliffs. Marie sits on a suitcase in the porch. Alone.

MARIE (V.O.)
The exhibition was a huge success.

INT. MAYFAIR GALLERY - NIGHT

The room is a hive of ART-GOERS' laughter and chatter as they drink champagne and stalk the walls of the gallery.

Dante's work is a contrast of oppressive provincial landscapes and visceral urban portraits of varying models.

Dante is surrounded by a cluster of young 'Bohemian' women. But he looks bored, performative.

They all desire to speak more and more intimately with him.

ALEXANDER (60s), Saville Row suit, steely eyes, oozes confidence, stands beside Marie. She is distracted by Dante.

ALEXANDER
(Austrian lilt)
It's 'very' artistic, wouldn't you
say? Almost a shame it has to be
sold.

MARIE
I think the artist would disagree.

ALEXANDER
Oh, Matthias is very fond of the
sale. He just pretends otherwise.
I'm his father, Alexander
Buchberger.

MARIE
Matthias?

ALEXANDER
Dante was my idea. What's your
name? Are you French?

Marie looks at Dante laughing in the corner. She feels
overwhelmed and walks out into the cold London night.

EXT. MAYFAIR STREET - NIGHT

Alexander follows Marie onto the street.

ALEXANDER
I have a proposition for you,
Madame. I am cultural ambassador at
the Austrian embassy and there is a
recital that I must attend, in only
twenty minutes. Would you care to
join me?

Marie looks into his eyes and knows the man lacks integrity,
but she goes anyway.

INT. AUSTRIAN CULTURAL EMBASSY - NIGHT

The first-floor room in this mansion is an over-decorated
cage of Baroque gold and marble sculptures.

Smartly dressed GUESTS sit in rows, listening to a most
sublime aria.

An Austrian tenor sings *Basilio* with piano accompaniment,
from *Le nozze di Figaro*. *In quegli anni in cui val poco*.

Alexander sits with a look of practiced attention, whereas
the music puts Marie rather into a melancholic trance.

A poignant, forlorn emotion casting her mind elsewhere.

INT. ROYAL OPERA HOUSE - NIGHT

Dante sits in the stalls. Beside him, ANGELA, prim, in a cocktail hat, is weeping too enthusiastically for the scene.

Dante is entranced by the climax of *Madama Butterfly*, but in a melancholic tone, much like Marie's from the Mozart.

INT. MARIE'S APARTMENT - DAY (PRESENT)

Marie sits back down at her desk.

MICHAEL

And the father? Did you find out much about him?

MARIE

No. I left the recital straight away. Alexander was a fraud - Salzburg royalty who hadn't a penny for the truth.

MICHAEL

At least he supports the arts.

MARIE

That's when Dante moved to Berlin. East Berlin. He said the shadows of revolution were inspiring. Sometimes he came back to London looking for me, to share all his feelings.

EXT. EMBANKMENT - NIGHT

Marie and Dante sit on a bench facing the Thames.

She pulls him consolingly onto her shoulder. He rests on her, making no attempt to repress his romantic affections.

EXT./INT. BERLIN APARTMENT - DAY (1 YEAR AGO)

A top-floor studio. Concrete walls. A view onto the urban courtyard below. Cold. Distinctly Berlin.

Marie climbs the stairwell.

MARIE (V.O.)

I visited him last year. But it was a mistake.

Dante (44, looking 50) opens the door. The fire is gone, his energy is more ashen, slow, uninspired.

He makes coffee in a machine that rumbles mechanically.

Marie (61) watches him. Just two people in a narrow kitchen. No animosity or passion. She sits down at the table.

EXT. BRANDENBURG GATE - DAY

They walk between the neoclassical arches and admire them. Dante raises a film camera at Marie.

DANTE

Marie. Just one.

SNAP. The shutter echoes and time at the Brandenburg gate is frozen, in monochrome.

MARIE (V.O.)

He lives by the rule of the revolutionary couple - the two lovers are ready to abandon the other at any moment if revolution demands it. It's the same rule of wanting to be a great artist - you have to kill the human being first.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

It's a paradox. There is nothing more human than great art.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - DAY (PRESENT)

Marie unwraps Michael's book.

MARIE

(reading the blurb)

'Love is the most essential role in life, but not all are able to play a part.' That's a bit pessimistic.

MICHAEL

I believe that's the reality, don't you? The psychology is not as simplistic as it sounds.

MARIE

Of course. But I think the truth is that some people are capable of loving everything, which makes them incapable of loving one thing.

MICHAEL

Like an artist.

MARIE

Like Dante.

MICHAEL

Some people love only themselves.

MARIE
Comme tout le monde.

Michael laughs. Then he stands and kisses her once on the cheek, a rather dry goodbye.

MICHAEL
 Goodbye, Marie. Don't spend too long in solitude.

MARIE
 Why not. I might just vanish here into thin air.

MICHAEL
 Just leave a note if you do.

MARIE
 Go now. Darling. Thank you for the gift.

Michael parts. Marie carelessly throws his book to the floor, clearing space on her desk to sign more copies of her work.

INT. BLOOMSBURY BOOKSHOP - DAY

Marie sits in the window. A Journalist's camera FLASHES.

FEMALE JOURNALIST
 Why is it a mistake to love artists?

MARIE
 (calm)
 I don't say that. I say that an artist is capable of *la grande illusion*.

Another camera flashes.

INT. ROYAL OPERA HOUSE - NIGHT

Marie sits in the front row. The conductor's baton rises, as a delightful aria fills the house.

CHERUBINO
Voi, che sapete che cosa é amor...

Marie's face is one of perplexity, mirroring Mozart's aria, *What is love? Is it you my love who knows what love is?*

And yet as the music swells, Marie is no longer a footnote or a muse, but she is the author of her own life, her own truth.