

THE DANCER

By

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FADE IN

INT. OLD APARTMENT - NIGHT

We hear faint music and celluloid crackle as dust particles dance in a thin shaft of moonlight.

A YOUNG GIRL watches, wide eyes just inches from the beam. She lies on her side, face poking through dirty blankets and a hijab.

Orange flashes faintly in the dark followed by the distant thump of an explosion. The dust dances crazier and her eyes, for a second, flicker with delight. Slowly the music fades and is replaced by the sound of the bombardment.

A wide shot reveals a larger swathe of moonlight streaming through the broken wall of an abandoned bombed out apartment. The girl is alone. She nestles herself tight into her cocoon as distant explosions gently strobe the room.

INT. OLD APARTMENT - MORNING

Low morning sun warms the derelict walls. Half of the floor above has collapsed into the girl's flat. Broken pieces of furniture litter what's left of the room. An old cupboard lies on its side, almost buried under the tilted rubble.

The girl is eating with her fingers from a chipped bowl, eyes closed in the warm light. She hums a gentle tune as she eats, feet tapping a quiet beat on the concrete.

Suddenly, the sound of voices outside. She scurries across to the cupboard and disappears inside. The door shuts carefully behind her.

INT. HIDEOUT - MORNING

A match splutters in the dark and candlelight reveals a tiny hideaway under the collapsed floor. We see curled schoolbooks, short pencils, ancient records. There is a large bag of rice in the corner and various tins of food, army rations, provisions.

She picks up a faded VHS which has fallen from its makeshift shelf and looks at the cover. Glitzy 1930s titles wrap around the picture of a handsome man smiling in top hat and tails, "THE DANCER". In the flickering light his face seems alive. She blows him a kiss and replaces the tape on the shelf.

With a sigh, she picks up a textbook and soon she is lost in her studies.

EXT. A BOMBED OUT STREET - DAY

Her eyes squint in the hard sun. She holds a tiny plastic bag of vegetables close as she walks briskly down the sidewalk.

Two men appear in front of her. Beards, loosely military clothing. A Kalashnikov is slung over one of the men's shoulders. The other is dressed all in black.

She bows her head and quickens her pace around them. Three sharp claps ring out and she looks up to see one of the men angrily circling his face with his finger. She quickly tightens the hijab about her face and hurries on.

The men watch silently after her.

INT. OLD APARTMENT - EVENING

She sits and sobs quietly in the shadows by her window.

Suddenly she hears a quiet TAP TAP. She rushes to her feet but her eyes widen as she realizes it is coming from her cupboard.

TAP TAP TAP.

She prepares to run but looks back at the door in despair.

TAP... TAP TAP TAP as she tiptoes across the room.

The cupboard pops open and a man in a tuxedo tumbles out clutching his top hat. He rolls twice and springs to his feet, dusting himself quickly as he settles into a dance pose, arms wide, glaring intently.

For a long time she stares, her back frozen against the wall.

He slowly lets loose a handsome grin and she slides to the floor, entranced. A tiny smile creeps onto her lips.

He twirls once, beautifully and faces her again with a cracked record in his hand. He taps the dust off with the back of his white glove and runs his finger along the crack, tutting sadly.

He spins again and a little gramophone player appears in his other hand. He puts the player on the ground beside him and elegantly starts the record. As he begins to dance, the needle jerks randomly across the crack. He careens wildly at every skip in the music.

She giggles as she watches, he seems to know every jump off by heart. As the needle finally grinds to a halt he leaps and lands solidly in front of her. Bits of plaster fall from the ceiling above and he feigns horror, holding his hat above him like an umbrella.

As she claps quietly and ecstatically, low men's voices break the spell, close outside.

Like a rabbit he hops for the cupboard door and she follows close behind.

INT. HIDEOUT - EVENING

A candle is flickering as the back of the cupboard opens and she tumbles through. She is disappointed to see that there is no sign of the dancer. She smiles anyway and blows out the light.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

The girl is peering through a bush. The bearded men are in the distance. She turns and walks the other way, frustration in her eyes.

INT. OLD APARTMENT - DAY

She crawls into the apartment through a crack in the collapsed doorway. As she stands, she sees the dancer waiting for her, crouching above on the collapsed floor. Head in hands, he apes the frustration on her face. She screws her nose at him, clicks her heels.

He leaps into action and trips down the floor into a dashing routine. He taps complex rhythms across the rubbish in the room, teetering off broken chairs, twisting about blocks of concrete, tipping his hat, amazing. He slides across the floor and magically rises to his feet again in front of her.

She stares at his face in awe but he waves his hands in front of her eyes and points down to his feet. He taps out a simple routine and waits for her to follow.

Slowly, but not terribly, she copies his footwork and earns a smile. Three gentle claps of his white gloved hands and he points to his feet again. The lesson continues.

INT. OLD APARTMENT - LATER

He watches thoughtfully, chin in hand, as she works carefully through a simple routine.

INT. OLD APARTMENT - EVENING

Together they click through a tricky sequence and spin into a perfect finish. He politely claps and bows.

INT. OLD APARTMENT - NIGHT

Alone, she watches dust dance in the moonlight.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

She walks briskly, a spring in her step, a piece of fruit clutched before her like a dance partner.

A truck rattles past. Its ruined tire flaps a rhythm and she sneaks a couple of steps in time. She looks around quickly to make sure nobody spotted her.

Two old women beat their rugs together in a tricky rhythm and she carefully skips a few beats along with them.

A jet whistles overhead and as she sweeps around a corner waltzing her fruit she bumps straight into the man in black.

His partner jumps reflexly. The Kalashnikov appears in his hands for a second then drops back casually into its strap.

The man in black stares. He takes the fruit from her shaking hands and takes a bite. His face screws up and he throws it against a wall.

Head bundled low, she sprints off. There is no music in the pounding of her feet on the pavement.

INT. HIDEOUT - DAY

She is cramming what she can into a rucksack, picking up and swapping schoolbooks for rations, trinkets for torches and matches. She counts the remaining notes in a men's wallet, glancing sadly at a man's face on a card within. She stops to look at her VHS collection and breaks down, sobbing quietly.

INT. OLD APARTMENT - LATER

She pokes her head out of the cupboard, pushing the rucksack ahead of her. The dancer is waiting for her.

He wiggles his finger petulantly at her, no no no! His face turns to a scowl and he starts to dance about like an angry monkey. A tiny smile lights her face.

There is a scuffle above, the sound of boots on concrete and a dark shape descends on the dancer. The man in black slams him hard against the wall.

Smiling now, the dancer raises his eyebrows and wiggles at her again. Another man appears from nowhere and lunges towards her as she scampers back into the dark.

INT. HIDEOUT - DAY

It's pitch black and we hear her shuffling and sliding, panting, crying, exhausted.

Eventually the crack of a door appears before her and gently lights her face, all tears and dirt. All we hear now are strange sounds from ahead, through the door.

She creeps on and peaks through. Uniformed legs stomp past in shiny boots. She pulls back an inch. The clacking of boots disappears and a lightly tripping sound replaces it. Long legs flock past in ballet shoes and tutus, giggling.

She creeps closer to the door as three spotlights slam on in succession, BANG BANG BANG.

She crawls out half blind and follows the ballerinas into the light. An orchestra is tuning up somewhere. As more people appear around her she slips nervously behind some curtains and shuffles through darkness. The sonic chaos winds up outside, then suddenly, silence.

She carefully parts the curtain and immediately sees the dancer. He is reclining on a white grand piano surrounded by a chorus, smiling straight at her.

On cue, the band swings into action. The dancer snaps his fingers in time on one hand, beckoning her out with the other. Men in matching uniforms appear from nowhere and form a smiling guard of honour. Their hands wave her onto the stage, perfectly in sync.

He leaps from the piano and begins his routine. This is the real deal now, swinging cane and flying top hat. The other dancers whirl about him as he trips smiling towards her, reaching out his hand to her between spins.

Slowly she is drawn into the action. The crew smiles from the sidelines, soldiers twirl, ballerinas float about her like dandelions as she joins in.

As they wind their way into the finale, confetti drops from the ceiling and dances in the studio lights.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OLD APARTMENT - NIGHT

The dust particles, floating silently in the moonlight.

FADE OUT.