

# THE PHANTOM GLARE OF DAY

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## EXCERPT

*London, 29 September, 1917*

Early that morning at the Chelsea Court Hotel, Cécilia finally realized that last month's assignation with her ice-skating instructor had left her pregnant. For the longest time, she paced about her suite and debated the question of what might be the best way to tell him. Whatever she said, Herr Wechseljahr would be galled. The old man would almost certainly accuse her of being marriage-minded, and he would insist that she had planned everything all along. At some point, too, he would be sure to lament her upcoming debut.

“For so long, I've been choreographing that glorious ice ballet,” he would tell her. “And you treat me like this?”

At nine o'clock, when Cécilia reached Empress Avenue Ice Arena, she continued into the grand antechamber but then stopped. How do I tell him the bad news?

In time, the wintry air of the electric skating palace made her teeth chatter. Worse still, the aroma of the snack bar's freshly-brewed, Cadbury drinking chocolate happened to be very strong that day—strong enough to make her retch.

The ice arena's various loudspeakers crackled to life, and as she continued to convulse, a warped recording of Édouard Lalo's “Ballade à la lune” commenced.

As the music played, several diminutive schoolgirls laced up and ventured off into the imponderable beauty of the oval rink.

Cécilia climbed into the hard-oak terrace, and she watched the most winsome of the children perform a fan spiral.

The Lalo recording concluded, and the vast skating palace grew as quiet as the ruins of the Colosseum.

Cäcilia's thoughts turned to Knightsbridge Casino. One week earlier, she had lost a considerable amount at the baccarat table. As such, she did not have sufficient funds to hire someone to tend to a newborn baby. Before long, she turned to one of the loudspeakers.

If only another recording would begin—and disrupt the quietude, the solemnity.

From the direction of the snack bar, the aroma of Cadbury drinking chocolate grew even more sickly-sweet. Worse yet, the scent of the pungent Cocoa Essence had begun to commingle with the smoldering lampblack odor of the rubber tiles surrounding the boards.

Down on the ice, the little girl from before, the one who had performed the fan spiral, commenced a series of intricate step sequences.

And now the door to the grand antechamber opened, and Herr Wechseljahr made his entrance. When he reached the terrace, he flashed a proud, fatherly smile and greeted Cäcilia with his customary Roman salute.