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Kirill Borgia



**ECHOES FROM THE WOMBS
OF TARTARIA**

Erotic Saga

3

Kirill Borgia

**Echoes from the
Wombs of Tartaria — 3**

«Издательские решения»

Borgia K.

Echoes from the Wombs of Tartaria — 3 / K. Borgia —
«Издательские решения»,

An immortal archivist fleeing his own century boards a southbound train into the fading Russian Empire — drawn by whispers of a forgotten female cult tied to the lost soul of Tartaria. As desire, memory, and ancient bloodlines entwine, Yarosvet Zorich is pulled into a shadowed world where beauty becomes ritual, motherhood becomes power, and the past refuses to stay buried.

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Cover art Fooocus

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ISBN 978-5-0070-5363-1 (т. 3)

ISBN 978-5-0070-2123-4

Created with Ridero smart publishing system

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All characters depicted in this work are 18 years of age or older. Where a character's age is not restated in the current volume, it has been established in a previous volume of the series and remains unchanged unless explicitly stated otherwise.

The Sixth Echo

The days that followed in Rostov unfolded for Yarosvet and Taissia like a quietly enchanted interlude, suspended between the dusty, business-ridden pulse of the provincial city and the languorous current of the southern river. They passed the hours as though time itself were an indulgent host, granting them leisure to savour without haste.

Together they wandered through the bustling streets, where the smell of freshly baked bread mingled with the acrid tang of horse sweat and wagon grease, and the cries of vendors rang against the sun-warmed facades of merchant houses. Yarosvet, with his measured pace and attentive gaze, would pause now and again to point out some architectural detail — a wrought-iron balcony curling like a vine, a carved pediment darkened by decades of soot — while Taissia, quick and playful, slipped her arm into his and pulled him into the living current of the crowd. She delighted in the sheer variety of faces, the whiff of foreign accents from Armenian and Greek traders, the rough banter of stevedores on leave. Her laughter, sudden and bright, often drew curious glances; yet Yarosvet accepted it with a grave indulgence, as though he found in her unrestrained mirth both an echo of youth and an antidote to his own measured solitude.

One afternoon they took to the river again, this time downstream, where the Don widened and lay stretched like a burnished mirror beneath the heavy sky. The steamer creaked and shuddered as it cut the current, while along the banks vineyards, white cottages, and sleepy fishing villages slipped past like fleeting scenes of a painted scroll. Taissia stood at the rail, the mahogany collar at her throat catching a gleam of late sunlight, and let the wind tug at her hair until it streamed like a dark banner behind her. She leaned out dangerously far, calling to Yarosvet to look at some fisherman's hut balanced on stilts above the shallows; his instinctive motion to steady her — a hand firm upon her back — sent a peculiar warmth into her chest, half comfort, half thrill. He, in turn, found himself strangely disarmed by the innocence of her delight, which even the smoke and noise of the steamer could not dim.

Evenings were reserved for the theatre. Rostov, with all its provincial swagger, prided itself upon stages where travelling troupes brought melodramas and comedies alive with gestures broad enough to reach the farthest rows. Yarosvet, seated beside Taissia beneath the flickering glow of oil lamps, would watch her as much as the actors — her lips parted in breathless amusement, her brows raised in mock severity, her quick, whispered comments that teased both stage and audience. She applauded with fervour, her palms reddened by the vigour of her enthusiasm, while Yarosvet's measured clapping carried a quieter gravity, yet no less genuine appreciation.

Afterwards, when they emerged into the warm night, the city seemed softer, as though transformed by the lingering cadence of violins and stage voices. The cobblestones reflected patches of moonlight, and the distant murmur of the river lay beneath the hum of taverns and passing carriages. Taissia often walked a few steps ahead, her figure light and teasing, then fell back abruptly to seize his arm, leaning into him with a mixture of tenderness and deliberate mischief. He, grave and composed, allowed himself the rare indulgence of a smile, which in her eyes seemed richer than a thousand gallant speeches.

Thus the days in Rostov were neither marked by incident nor weighed down by solemn purpose; rather, they bore the delicate charm of hours spent in harmony, where the city itself became a backdrop for a dialogue of two spirits — one youthful, impulsive, sparkling with laughter, the other seasoned, restrained, yet open to a warmth he had long thought unattainable.

On the fifth morning of their stay in Rostov, as the light crept into their lodging through half-drawn curtains, a letter was delivered — a modest envelope, its seal already faintly smudged by the courier's hand. Taissia, ever quick to seize the little dramas of chance, was the first to notice it upon

the tray with their tea and bread. She held it aloft like a captured bird, teasing Yarosvet with her guesses at its content, before passing it to him with a flourish.

The handwriting, familiar and slender, belonged to Inga. Yarosvet's brows knitted faintly as he unfolded the paper, though not from displeasure but rather from a quiet concentration that always overtook him in such moments. The letter was concise yet tinged with a personal warmth: she informed him, first of all, that his passport — a matter of much quiet importance — was now prepared and awaiting him at her office. He need not hurry in any official sense, for her superior, Mr Petrov, was determined to observe the customary fortnight's delay before handing documents to a client. But should Yarosvet call, as if by chance and without undue ceremony, Inga would be able to place the papers discreetly into his hands.

More than that, she hinted at another matter, more delicate and wrapped in discretion. She had already spoken with Zlata and arranged the prospect of a meeting, though the particulars, she stressed, could not be entrusted to paper. Those details she reserved for a private word, once he came for the passport.

The note ended with a restrained turn of phrase, yet its undertone betrayed both a conspiratorial closeness and a flicker of feminine pride at having succeeded in smoothing paths ahead of him. Yarosvet refolded the sheet with deliberate care and set it beside his cup. For a while he remained silent, gazing at the rippling surface of the tea as though it mirrored more than steam and amber.

Taissia, chin propped upon her palm, studied him with the curiosity of a cat. She would not pry, not openly — but her eyes sparkled with unspoken questions, and her lips, curved in a sly half-smile, seemed to suggest that she already wove her own daring fancies from the mere name of Inga.

When Yarosvet, after a pause, recounted to Taissia the essence of Inga's letter, her eyes lit up with immediate, mischievous delight. She clapped her hands softly, as though he had just revealed the promise of some new escapade.

"Then I shall come with you this time," she declared, leaning forward, her voice vibrant with resolve. "If you are to call upon Mr Petrov's office for your own passport, that will be the perfect excuse to order one for me as well. Let him fuss with his formalities — I'll stand beside you and see that he takes my measure too."

There was a reckless sparkle in her glance, half-play, half-defiance, as though she already imagined the respectable clerk compelled to enter her name in his ledgers. Then, with a sly smile tugging at her lips, she added:

"And I daresay Inga will wish to speak with you about this Zlata again. Do you remember? The last time it was during her noon interval, when she simply stepped out of the office for her meal at the little café next door, where you were waiting. So we should arrive close to midday, no earlier, no later. That will suit her perfectly."

Yarosvet, listening, allowed himself a slow nod. There was in her suggestion both practicality and an unashamed boldness that amused him. He reached out, drew her near, and pressed a deliberate kiss upon her lips. Then, with a half-smile that softened the habitual gravity of his features, he touched her throat and adjusted the slender mahogany collar resting there, his fingers momentarily lingering on the smooth edge of the leather and the small brass buckle.

"Dress yourself, then," he said with quiet authority, though not without tenderness. "We shall go together."

Taissia rose at once, the triumph in her eyes only partly veiled by her mock solemn curtsy, and hurried to the wardrobe with the eager air of a conspirator dressing for adventure.

At precisely a quarter past twelve, Yarosvet laid his hand upon the latch and swung open the door for Taissia. Beside it hung a small, dark-green plaque, fastened firmly yet weather-stained against the years. The gilt letters, though already fading, still declared their bureaucratic dignity: "*Bureau of Civil Documents — Registration and Amendments.*" The words struck him with instant recognition, the way one recalls a stern acquaintance one would rather avoid, yet cannot dismiss.

Within, the narrow vestibule carried that faint odour of ink, paper dust, and iron stoves so typical of government offices. Behind the high counter stood Inga, her posture impeccable, her expression composed in an official mask. Yet her eyes, quick and luminous, betrayed a glimmer of something unspoken as they flicked from Yarosvet to the girl at his side. With measured formality she noted their arrival, her voice crisp and steady as she announced the presence of Mr Zorich to her superior. Then, with the deference of routine, she guided them into the main chamber.

There, at the familiar desk, sat Mr Petrov. He scarcely moved save for the slow closing of the ledger in which his fine script had been flowing. The thin wire-rimmed spectacles upon his nose caught a shard of muted daylight from the tall window, lending his gaze a clarity almost judicial. When at last he looked up, there was in his eyes the same calm discernment as before — that unhurried habit of weighing not merely appearances but hidden purposes, as though each visitor were an entry in the great ledger of his mind.

Yarosvet entered with the air of a man who had merely chosen, on a warm afternoon, to escort his companion through the dry machinery of civil formalities. He inclined his head courteously, as though their presence in the office were prompted by no urgency at all, and let his measured words unfold with casual gravity.

“Permit me, Ivan Dmitrievich,” he began, settling Taissia gently before the desk as one might present a precious though unruly ward, “to trespass upon your good nature with a matter of some delicacy. This young lady” — his hand rested for an instant upon her shoulder, where the mahogany collar gleamed faintly in the half-light — “finds herself in need of a new passport. We have heard that few men in this city command the discretion and precision that you bring to such affairs. If there is a path, however narrow, by which you might extend your assistance to her, I should be deeply obliged.”

He spoke as if nothing were further from his mind than his own papers, already neatly concluded and waiting within reach. His composure, so evenly sustained, suggested a man who considered bureaucracy merely another stage upon which to perform a role.

Taissia, for her part, remained perfectly still, though her eyes betrayed both the thrill of the charade and the eagerness of a conspirator stepping into a new intrigue. She lowered her lashes, imitating a demure gravity entirely at odds with the quicksilver mischief alive in her.

Across the desk, Petrov adjusted the position of his ledger, regarding them with that cool attentiveness which could make even silence feel like an interrogation. His gaze lingered on Taissia, then shifted briefly to Yarosvet, as if to weigh the sincerity of the request against the unspoken knowledge he already held.

Petrov gave a slow, studied nod, his lips pressed into that thin line which, in another man, might have been mistaken for a smile.

“You have come, sir, precisely to the right door,” he said evenly, his voice carrying the unhurried weight of one accustomed to being obeyed. “To hear of my modest qualities is one matter; to receive their undeniable proof is quite another.”

With composed serenity he slid open the upper drawer of his desk and withdrew a neat envelope of heavy paper, its edges clean and uncreased, the seal unbroken. He extended it across the desk with a gesture at once formal and intimate, as though presenting not merely a document but a token of confidence.

Yarosvet accepted it with grave courtesy, broke the seal, and unfolded the crisp contents. There lay his new passport, pristine and complete, its lettering sharp as though etched upon glass. For the briefest instant he allowed his features to assume an expression of pleasant astonishment, as if fortune had chosen to surprise him in this dry chamber of bureaucracy.

“My thanks, Ivan Dmitrievich,” he said warmly, inclining his head.

Mr Petrov waved a hand in modest dismissal, though the gleam in his spectacles betrayed a certain satisfaction.

“Yes, yes. It was concluded somewhat sooner than promised,” he admitted, “but I cannot in good conscience demand anything further of so esteemed a client beyond what has already been settled. What was paid suffices.”

He paused there, fingers resting lightly on the closed ledger, his eyes shifting to Taissia with a measured slowness.

“As for a new passport...” His voice trailed into silence, leaving the words suspended between courtesy and calculation. It was clear he was weighing, not merely the fee, but the implications of the request itself.

Taissia, tilting subtly, extended her passport in his direction, as though presenting not merely a document but a deliberate challenge. A faint, roguish smile curved her lips, and her eyes sparkled with that audacious fire which could unsettle almost anyone — save, it seemed, Mr Petrov himself.

He took the passport, lifting it carefully to eye level, and examined it with the meticulous attention that had become second nature to him. Each movement was precise, ritualistic, as if the simple act of reading a paper could command both respect and obedience. Then, his gaze still fixed upon the document, he began to read aloud, articulating each entry with measured clarity:

“Name: Larisa Petrovna Kovalyova. Date of birth: the eighteenth of June, eighteen seventy-eight. Place of birth: Moscow. Current residence as stated. Profession: none. Religion: Orthodox. Marital status: unmarried. Height: five feet four inches. Build: slender. Hair: red. Eyes: grey-brown. Distinguishing marks: none recorded.”

Each word was pronounced with that calm authority which rendered even mundane facts compelling, as if the recital itself were a performance of civic ritual rather than mere bureaucracy.

Petrov’s eyes lifted from the document, meeting Taissia’s with that quiet scrutiny he always wielded so effortlessly. His thin spectacles caught the muted light of the window, giving his gaze an almost judicial sharpness.

“And pray tell,” he asked, his tone calm but edged with genuine curiosity, “what, in this passport as it stands, is found lacking? Surely the details are complete and accurate.”

The question hung in the air like a measured challenge, formal yet subtly inviting, leaving Taissia a moment to craft her reply while Yarosvet observed, his expression carefully composed, concealing the faint amusement stirring behind his measured gravity.

“Yes, the details are correct,” she said, her voice clear and unwavering, “except for my name. The Kovalyovs took me from the orphanage and named me Larisa, though I remember that before, I was called Taissia. I wish to renounce that name entirely and become Taissia Alexeyevna Zorich. Keep the year of birth the same, but assign a different day and month — so that my adoptive parents, from whom I ran away, will have no way of finding me.”

She leaned forward slightly, the roguish smile still tugging at her lips, and added, “I suggest the eighth of March.”

Yarosvet’s gaze met hers, and only he understood the weight of that choice — the day when, not long ago, he had lifted her from the station platform and brought her to his compartment, the moment that had quietly marked the beginning of their peculiar, irrevocable bond.

Mr Petrov, meanwhile, regarded her with measured attention, his thin spectacles reflecting the soft afternoon light. He made careful notes in his ledger as she spoke, each word recorded with the meticulous precision he applied to all official matters. Then he paused, a faint shadow of hesitation crossing his face. “As for the surname,” he said slowly, “this will require alterations in both passports, particularly in the column denoting marital status...”

Taissia, unfazed, lifted her chin with that characteristic sparkle in her eyes. “No changes are necessary,” she interjected with calm assurance. “We may simply be namesakes, he and I.”

Mr Petrov’s thin lips curved ever so slightly, a faint acknowledgment of the logic behind her words. “Indeed,” he said, “that is entirely possible, and it simplifies matters considerably.”

Yarosvet, as was his habit, posed the question with calm directness: “And what, pray, will be the cost of her new passport?”

Mr Petrov let a pause linger, fingers tapping lightly against the closed ledger as though performing some intricate mental calculation. “The matter,” he finally said, “is somewhat more complicated than usual. Not only does the date of birth change, but — most importantly — the name and surname themselves must be altered.”

He tapped the table with a measured rhythm. “In conclusion, I believe this can be arranged for... two hundred rubles... and another two hundred. Four hundred in total.”

Taissia’s eyes widened, disbelief flickering across her face. She glanced at Yarosvet, incredulous, as if to confirm she had heard correctly.

Yarosvet, serene and unshaken, withdrew a neat bundle of notes from his pocket and counted out half the sum. “The remainder will follow on the day of receipt,” he said quietly. “When, may I ask, can we expect that?”

“Just as last time,” Mr Petrov replied, “in two weeks’ time — though that fortnight will be over in a week.”

With careful hands, he took the payment, returned Taissia’s passport to her, and added with a measured tone, “Mr Zorich, you understand the matter perfectly.”

Yarosvet inclined himself with his customary gravity, bowing slightly in quiet acknowledgment of Mr Petrov’s words. Taissia rose beside him, the subtle glint of triumph still dancing in her eyes, and together they moved toward the door.

As they passed by Inga, who had returned to her post behind the counter, her voice, low and smooth, drifted after them just enough to be heard.

“Wait for me at the usual café,” she murmured, “on the far side of the square.”

Yarosvet’s gaze met hers for a brief instant, a flicker of understanding passing between them, and he inclined his head in silent agreement. Taissia, catching nothing but the tone, gave a barely perceptible nod, her curiosity piqued, and they continued on their way, the muted bustle of the street welcoming them into the warm, sunlit square.

As they made their way across the sunlit square toward the café, Taissia’s indignation flared, her voice rising with animated protest.

“That Petrov is a thief, truly! Such prices — what a robbery! The police ought to have their eyes on him, if ever there was a man crying out for justice,” she declared, tossing her head and letting the straps of her dress shift with the motion.

Yarosvet’s expression remained calm, measured, his voice steady as he sought to temper her fire. “Money exists to be spent, Taissia,” he said simply, “and there is no shame in giving it where it is needed. As for the police, they have their eyes on Petrov too, and he is compelled to share accordingly.”

She scowled, stamping a delicate foot. “Why pay so dearly when one could pay far less?”

A faint smile touched his lips, and his gaze held hers with gentle patience. “Then perhaps we should seek out an office with cheaper rates,” he suggested lightly.

Her cheeks warmed as she realized the heat of her earlier words. “I... perhaps I spoke too sharply,” she admitted, her roguish smile softening.

He offered a subtle bow, the faint glimmer of amusement in his grey-brown eyes. “Indeed,” he added, “though, for what it’s worth, you are worth every ruble.”

The words struck her like a soft, warm gale. Without hesitation, she rose onto her tiptoes and pressed a brief, bold kiss upon his lips. Together, fingers lightly brushing, they entered the café, leaving behind the square and the murmurs of their private triumph.

Before long, Inga joined them at the table, slipping into the familiar corner with her usual composed grace. Her eyes, bright and alert, found Yarosvet first.

“Congratulations on your new passport,” she said, her voice warm yet tinged with that subtle professional precision which always kept personal sentiment carefully in check.

Yarosvet inclined his head in acknowledgment, the faintest shadow of a smile crossing his features. “Thank you for your assistance, Inga. We intend to remain in Rostov for at least another week.”

“I am aware,” she replied, a faint, knowing smirk playing on her lips.

Taissia, ever inquisitive, leaned slightly forward, her impish glance fixed on Inga. “And tell me, how did your meeting with your fiancé proceed?”

A delicate flush crept across Inga’s cheeks. She looked away for a moment, collecting herself, before answering evenly, “According to plan. So that, should — or when — I find myself with child, there will be no question as to the cause.”

Her words hung in the air, stated with that calm, precise manner which rendered them simultaneously intimate and disarmingly forthright, leaving both Yarosvet and Taissia to absorb the weight of their quiet implication.

Taissia, unable to restrain her impish curiosity any longer, leaned forward, a mischievous spark in her eyes, and asked Inga bluntly, “Which one do you think is larger and more beautiful — your fiancé’s or Yarosvet’s?”

“You are terribly bold, Taissia,” Inga said softly, her voice calm but edged with amusement. “If one were to judge by... presence alone, one might say that Yarosvet has the advantage in stature, yet in refinement and elegance... well, you see, each possesses qualities the other cannot claim.”

Taissia’s eyes flashed with playful defiance as she leaned slightly closer. “I simply cannot imagine anyone possessing a member more elegant, more... refined, than my beloved master’s,” she declared, her voice light but charged with certainty.

Inga’s gaze flicked down for a brief instant, noting the leather collar snugly encircling Taissia’s neck, its craftsmanship neat and precise. A faint smile curved her lips, warm and appreciative. “Indeed,” she said softly, “it suits you remarkably well — an exquisite choice, befitting both your spirit and... your devotion.”

Taissia’s cheeks tinged with a delicate warmth at the compliment, but her mischievous spark remained undimmed, as if the praise had only encouraged her boldness further. Yarosvet, seated quietly, observed the exchange with that calm, measured patience of his, his grey-brown eyes betraying the faintest trace of suppressed mirth.

Yarosvet’s grey-brown eyes met Inga’s, a faint smile tugging at the corners of his lips. “Taissia has shown herself a most capable pupil,” he said, his tone calm yet edged with approving regard, “and by her own initiative, she has identified another... doll.”

Inga’s brows lifted slightly, her eyes brightening with pleasant surprise. “Indeed?” she said, a soft note of admiration in her voice. “Congratulations, Taissia. I am glad to have been of service in such a worthy pursuit.”

Taissia, leaning back in her chair with a mischievous glint still in her eyes, recounted the visit of the girl, Darya, to their hotel. She described, in a tone that was equal parts teasing and factual, how Yarosvet, in her presence, had twice brought Darya to fulfillment, his control and precision evident in every movement.

A subtle shiver of surprise flickered across Inga’s features, mingling with a trace of curiosity, while Yarosvet observed silently, a faint shadow of pride and quiet satisfaction dancing in his composed, measured gaze.

After a moment, she softened her expression and shifted slightly closer, lowering her voice just enough to convey intimacy without betraying discretion. “We ought to discuss your forthcoming meeting with my friend Zlata,” she said, her tone calm, deliberate, and edged with that familiar precision.

Taissia's eyes sparkled with anticipation, and Yarosvet's eyes met hers, quietly urging her to listen.

"In response to my letter," Inga continued, "Zlata has written back. She wishes to meet you, Yarosvet, though she admits she is uncertain whether she is ready to bear children. There are two suitors in her stanitsa, and should anything of that sort occur, she would not be surprised if a knife fight were to ensue."

"It seems Zlata is not one to waste her time," Taissia remarked, her tone carrying a playful, teasing irony.

A subtle glint passed through Inga's gaze, sharp and discerning, before her lips parted with carefully chosen words. "Actually, Zlata holds no particular affection for either of them," she said. "Her concern lies solely with their well-being and the general peace of mind of those around her."

Yarosvet's expression remained calm, his grey-brown eyes steady and unyielding. "I cannot, nor do I wish to, constrain Zlata in any way," he said quietly. "Whether any connection arises between us depends entirely upon her own desire. And make no mistake — I shall harbor no resentment should she choose otherwise."

Inga's gaze sharpened slightly, thoughtful yet unhurried. "Zlata understands this perfectly," she said. "From the tone of her reply, she seems somewhat bewildered, caught between curiosity and caution. For now, I suggest we all simply meet. What happens after that... will depend entirely on circumstances."

Taissia gave a little laugh, bright and cutting, her eyes glinting with that mischievous fire so peculiarly her own. "Oh, I can only imagine how 'circumstances' will unfold," she said, her tone threaded with sly anticipation. "Zlata may be bewildered now, but once she lays eyes on my master, I doubt she will remain so for long."

Yarosvet exhaled softly, neither denying nor encouraging the provocation, his expression calm, almost unreadable. Yet beneath that measured composure, a glimmer of quiet indulgence stirred, as though he found her brazenness both troublesome and endearing.

He allowed himself a slow, considered shift in his stance, maintaining his calm scrutiny of Inga. "And how, then, do you propose we arrange this meeting with Zlata? When and how shall it occur?"

Inga's gaze was calm but incisive, measuring both the man and the situation with habitual precision. "It is best, I think, to frame her visit in a manner entirely proper for her station," she began, her voice low, carrying both firmness and the soft cadence of explanation. "Zlata will come to Rostov ostensibly to stay with me for a spell, to refine her needlework and her letters, perhaps even to study some rudiments of French. Such an arrangement will appear respectable, even necessary, to her family and the neighbours. No one will suspect that the trip serves any purpose beyond education and the company of a respectable friend."

She paused, letting her words settle, then continued with a faint, knowing smile. "In this way, she will be free to be in the city without arousing scandal. Any delay in her return to the stanitsa can be accounted for by lessons, by errands to the market, or by the necessities of her studies. And should anything... unusual occur, it will remain concealed behind the pretext of her accomplishments. It is both prudent and... convenient within the realities of our Don way of life, where appearances weigh far more heavily than private intentions."

Yarosvet's grey-brown eyes met hers, the slightest twitch at the corner of his lips betraying an unspoken acknowledgment. "I see. A clever stratagem, then, preserving decorum while allowing freedom."

Taissia, perched on the edge of her seat, let out a soft, delighted laugh. "So she comes as the perfect pupil, and yet we are the secret witnesses of her... adventures?"

Inga inclined her head almost imperceptibly, the shadow of a smile crossing her features. "Exactly so. The outward propriety shields what is within, and the city provides the cover that the stanitsa cannot."

He regarded Inga with composed determination, his voice carrying quiet insistence. “You have explained the plan admirably, Inga, but I must ask once more: when shall this meeting with Zlata take place? We have scarcely a week — perhaps a little more — before our time in Rostov draws to a close.”

Inga’s eyes softened, a faint, playful light glimmering in them. “If you approve, I can fetch Zlata myself this coming weekend. She knows perfectly well why she comes to the city, and there is no need for pretence — her visit will be entirely voluntary and conscious. This will allow her to settle properly and meet you in due course.”

Taissia’s expression brightened, mischief flickering in her eyes, though she paused respectfully. “May I accompany her, sir?” she asked, turning to Yarosvet. “I am curious to see the stanitsa more closely... and it would be delightful to keep Inga company.”

Yarosvet studied her quietly, his gaze steady and measured. “If you wish it, Taissia, you may go,” he said at last, his voice calm yet authoritative. “But you shall not act on your own accord. We must ensure that Zlata meets me here, in the city, and that all proceeds properly. You will accompany Inga, nothing more.”

Taissia’s lips curved into a small, impish smile, acknowledging both the restriction and the privilege. “As you command, sir. Then it shall be an expedition with due obedience... and perhaps a touch of adventure.”

Inga nodded approvingly. “Exactly. She will come willingly, fully aware, and the meeting with you, Yarosvet, will decide everything. Until then, appearances remain as they must.”

Yarosvet allowed the faintest shadow of a smile to play at his lips. “Very well. Let us proceed in this manner. You will both see to the arrangements — and maintain the spirit of this undertaking as befits your nature.”

Taissia’s eyes sparkled as she spoke, her tone lively but deferential. “As you wish, sir. I will obey and make the most of our excursion.”

Inga’s gaze lingered on Yarosvet, softer now, the keen calculation giving way to something more personal, more human. A faint warmth coloured her cheeks as she spoke, her voice dropping to a quieter, intimate timbre. “I must confess... I have missed you, master,” she admitted, the words carrying both sincerity and a subtle, unguarded vulnerability.

Yarosvet’s expression remained composed, yet the faintest trace of acknowledgment softened the corners of his lips. He allowed a moment of silence, letting the weight of her words settle, before replying in his calm, measured tone. “I am pleased to hear it, Inga. Your company has always been... valued.”

Taissia, a teasing smile tugging at her lips, could not resist interjecting. “And your fiancé, Inga? Is he no longer enough to occupy your thoughts?”

“Oh, my fiancé is well enough, of course,” Inga replied, her voice gentle, carrying a note of quiet appreciation. “But certain... presences leave a mark that is difficult to ignore,” she added, glancing toward Yarosvet with an almost imperceptible warmth.

Taissia leaned closer to Inga across the small, polished table. “Then say it plainly... that you have missed my master’s... member,” she murmured, a sly glint in her eyes.

Inga’s cheeks flushed faintly, but she obeyed, her tone soft yet deliberate. “I have missed your master’s... member,” she repeated, lifting her gaze to meet Yarosvet’s eyes directly, a mixture of obedience and unspoken audacity in her expression.

Yarosvet, ever composed, allowed the faintest shadow of acknowledgment to play at the corners of his lips, observing the exchange with calm amusement tempered by measured restraint.

Taissia, seeing his subtle reaction, let herself smile triumphantly, pleased with the effect of her mischievous prompting.

Her voice dropped to a conspiratorial whisper. “And if you had him entirely at your disposal right now,” she murmured, her eyes glittering with mischievous curiosity, “what would you do?”

Inga's lips parted slightly, a flush rising to her cheeks, yet her eyes glimmered with a bold, vivid fire. "Oh," she breathed, voice low, tremulous yet precise, "I would begin by drawing him close, feeling the warmth of his flesh beneath my hands. My fingers would trace the rigid length, memorizing every contour, every pulse, every subtle twitch that betrays the quickening of his desire." She paused, letting the words hang between them, weighted with both intent and imagination. "I would press my lips to him, tasting, exploring, teasing him, coaxing a shiver or gasp from him, marking the points where he responds most vividly, until every inch of him is trembling, attuned to me alone."

Taissia's breath caught, her fingers tightening unconsciously on the edge of the table, while Inga continued, her tone measured yet laden with intimate color. "Then, if he resisted even a fraction, I would assert myself, bending him to my will, guiding him with gentle dominance, perhaps tracing the curve of his hips, the tension in his thighs, until he surrendered fully to my touch, each moment heightened by the contrast of pleasure and command." Inga's gaze lifted briefly to meet Yarosvet's, and for a heartbeat the room seemed to shrink around them, the clink of cups and low murmur of voices dissolving into the charged space between body and imagination.

"I would explore every reaction," Inga went on, her words deliberate, weaving desire into a tapestry of sensation, "from the smallest twitch to the deepest shiver, mapping his pleasure as though it were my own, learning where he yields and where he resists. And if he required correction — mild, instructive strikes to remind him who commands — I would not hesitate, the sharp brush of leather against skin merging with soft moans, an exquisite symphony of control and surrender."

Taissia's lips curved, her eyes narrowing with delight at the audacity of Inga's confession. "And after?" she pressed, leaning closer, voice barely audible above the soft clatter of the café.

Inga's fingers rested lightly on her knees, her voice now a velvet thread of anticipation. "After, I would guide him to the heights of release, each contraction of muscle, each tremor of skin, each pulse of desire absorbed and mirrored, until he lies spent beneath me, a testament to the meticulous care of my hands. And then, perhaps, I would let him recover, stroking and whispering, binding the memory to both body and mind, until he remembers, at every heartbeat, the intimate dominion I hold over him, and the exquisite knowledge that every sensation, every shiver, every gasp, has passed through me alone."

Her eyes glinted again at Taissia, cheeks flushed, breath soft but even. "All of this," Inga concluded, voice low and measured, "would be mine to command, and yet, in its entirety, I would care for him as one guards a rare jewel, knowing that each moment of surrender and each flutter of shivering skin is both a privilege and a proof of our... connection."

Taissia shivered slightly, the table between them fading into irrelevance, her imagination entwined with Inga's narrative, tasting the intimacy of words and flesh, the lush immediacy of fantasy made almost tangible, each syllable a pulse racing across skin and desire alike.

A faint, amused curve tugged at the corners of Yarosvet's lips, his grey-brown eyes bright with subtle mirth. "It is... rather gratifying," he said, his tone calm yet edged with teasing, "to find oneself in the company of a young woman so well-versed in words, one who can so artfully clothe her fantasies in language."

He allowed the praise to linger, measured and deliberate, observing the subtle blush that colored Inga's cheeks, the delicate tremor of her hands, and the faint catch of her breath, each small gesture revealing the sway of his comment.

Inga's eyes glistened, a fragile moisture threatening at the rims, and her lips trembled slightly. She looked at Yarosvet with an almost pleading intensity, voice barely above a whisper, laden with both vulnerability and desire. "Your compliments... they do honour me, sir," she admitted, the words tinged with a tremor of emotion, "but I would much rather... rather give my fantasies form in action, not merely in words."

Taissia's eyes flickered toward Yarosvet, a sly, knowing gleam dancing in their depths. "It seems," she murmured, her voice low and conspiratorial, "that Inga is quite... taken with you." Her

lips curled into a sly, almost impudent smile. “And I can hardly blame her. Were you to send me off to some husband or lover right now, I honestly do not know what I might do with myself.”

Inga gave a small, grateful nod, her eyes softening with appreciation. She tried to summon a smile, delicate and tentative, a quiet acknowledgment of Taissia’s words and the understanding they conveyed. Suddenly her expression shifted, a flicker of urgency crossing her features. “I... I have lingered too long,” she murmured, her voice quickening slightly. “I must return to the bureau at once.”

He permitted her to take her leave, yet insisted on agreeing how they would maintain contact. “This concerns your trip with Taissia to the stanitsa for Zlata — this coming weekend — as well as our next meeting, against which I, of course, raise no objection, and which Taissia shall endure.”

Taissia nodded, accepting the arrangement with that mixture of deference and playful acquiescence that so often marked her comportment.

“I am free each evening after work,” Inga said softly, “and, should you wish it — and allow it — I may come by the hotel, ostensibly to visit Taissia as a friend.” Her lips curved in the faintest, almost hesitant smile. “Of course, you need not wait for me; I understand entirely that you may have your own plans. But if I find you at the hotel, I can leave a note at the reception; you may then come down, and together we may decide how to spend the evening — just the three of us.”

Yarovet’s eyes met Inga’s, calm and steady, his voice carrying quiet approval. “A most excellent idea,” he said. “You shall always be a welcome guest.”

Taissia’s expression danced with impish delight, her eyes alight with a teasing glimmer. “And I shall be the most accommodating — and least jealous — of companions.”

* * *

The remaining days in Rostov unfolded with a languid, intoxicating rhythm, each hour steeped in quiet pleasures and mischievous indulgences. Mornings found Yarovet and Taissia wandering through the sunlit streets, delighting in the market stalls brimming with the scents of fresh bread and summer herbs, or pausing by the river to watch the ferries drift lazily down the Don. The soft murmur of the water and the warmth of the sun lent their strolls a gentle intimacy, each glance and touch charged with unspoken anticipation.

Afternoons were spent exploring the city’s quieter corners, the shadowed courtyards and hidden gardens offering perfect seclusion for whispered conversations and the lightest of caresses, their laughter mingling with the faint rustle of leaves. Occasionally they would seek out the thrill of more daring amusements — short carriage rides that allowed the thrill of exposure, or secluded terraces where Taissia could feel the thrill of freedom under Yarovet’s watchful gaze. Every moment was infused with a sense of deliberate play, a subtle weaving of pleasure, trust, and the unspoken rules of their unique companionship.

Evenings brought a different, more charged intimacy, for then Inga would arrive. She came with her usual quiet charm, slipping into their hotel rooms as though she were merely visiting a friend, yet the tension and unspoken desire that threaded through the air made the ordinary act of crossing the threshold electric. The three of them moved with careful discretion and mutual understanding, their encounters a delicate choreography of teasing, touch, and submission. Taissia, ever audacious, took pleasure in her small acts of mischief, while Yarovet maintained the serene authority that drew both women to him. Inga, meanwhile, balanced her eagerness with the subtle restraint of one accustomed to measuring her desires against circumstance, adding a thrilling unpredictability to their evenings.

These shared hours were a tapestry of sensation and emotion — erotic yet intimate, audacious yet tender. The boundaries of their pleasure were explored with an artistry that left each encounter vivid in memory: the brush of fingertips across bare skin, the quiet hum of suppressed sighs, the playful dominance and surrender that defined their peculiar triad. Each day, each meeting, wove them closer into a private, charged world where laughter, longing, and lust danced hand in hand, leaving the outside city unaware of the delicate, consuming drama unfolding within the quiet rooms of their temporary retreat.

One evening, as dusk draped Rostov in dusky violet and the gas lamps began their timid glow, the three of them wandered through the city streets. Yarosvet walked between the two women, his arms draped possessively around their waists, a calm command underlying each measured step. The world passed unaware, yet they alone carried the secret of what lay beneath the long, flowing coats — nothing but boots adorned their legs, the remainder of their bodies concealed yet aching close.

When they slipped into the shadowed solitude of a nearly deserted park, the dim light and absence of onlookers offered permission to indulge in hidden delight. In one fluid motion, coats were loosened, unfastened with deliberate care, and Yarosvet drew them both into his embrace. Their bare waists pressed against him, trembling slightly, each movement of his hands eliciting a shiver of delight. Taissia and Inga leaned into him from either side, their chests brushing against his clothing, the firm peaks of their nipples pressing insistently, aching with the friction of secrecy and closeness.

Their steps slowed, guided more by sensation than by direction, the rustle of leaves underfoot mingling with soft, stifled breaths. Yarosvet's hands traced the curves of their sides, feeling the warmth of skin where cloth had no claim, while they pressed their bodies closer, seeking both touch and the exquisite thrill of exposure. In this private, stolen moment, the world outside — the gaslit streets, the distant clatter of carriage wheels — ceased to exist. Only the quiet intimacy of three bodies, the subtle dance of desire and restraint, and the secret, shared audacity of their closeness mattered.

Later that evening — or perhaps on another, for no careful tally marked their escapades — both girls stood bare upon the balcony, their fingers clenching the cold iron railings as though seeking purchase against the world. The night air brushed their skin, heightening every sensation, while Yarosvet moved behind them with the deliberate grace of a predator and the control of a master.

Inga had brought with her a long, supple nagayka, its leather gleaming faintly under the gaslight. With precise, measured strokes, Yarosvet guided the whip across their exposed backs and rounded buttocks. The impact was firm, sharp, yet controlled, leaving a trail of heat and tingling fire along the delicate planes of their bodies. Both girls braced themselves against the rail, muscles taut, faces set in concentration, their task as clear as it was tormenting: not a cry, not a moan was to escape their lips, lest the neighbors be disturbed.

Each strike elicited a shiver that ran through their spines, each thrum of the whip against skin drawing a simultaneous ache of pain and thrill. They pressed forward instinctively, bodies yielding yet resisting, shoulders quivering, breath held and stifled. Yarosvet's hands roamed freely between strokes, caressing the warmth and curves left bare by the leather, guiding their posture, reinforcing his control. The night became a private theatre of desire and mastery, the cool air a stark contrast to the fire that coursed through them, and the strict rule of silence added a delicious edge to their obedience and temptation.

Even as their muscles burned and pulses raced, the unspoken agreement of secrecy and discipline bound them closer, a shared, electrifying complicity that made every whip's crack, every brush of his hand, and every tremor of skin against skin feel infinitely more intense.

On the evenings when they attended the theatre, Yarosvet, Taissia, and Inga always chose secluded boxes, hidden from prying eyes and softened by the muffled hum of the audience below. The velvet curtains and shadowed corners offered perfect concealment, a private stage upon a public one.

There, in the hushed dimness, the girls would slip free of their pantalettes, letting the fabric fall to the floor with barely a whisper. Beneath their skirts, their thighs spread ever so slightly, a silent invitation to his hands. Yarosvet's fingers roamed over the tender, glistening folds of their vulvas, teasing the swollen, sensitive lips with gentle pressure and deliberate strokes, eliciting small, stifled gasps that blended seamlessly into the muted rustle of the theatre. He lingered, exploring the slick warmth between them, tracing the hidden contours with a careful, commanding touch that set their pulses racing while remaining invisible to the world outside their shadowed box.

The thrill of exposure, the audacity of desire restrained only by the velvet partition, sent shivers of anticipation through all three of them. Each touch, each subtle shift of their bodies beneath the skirts, heightened the intimacy of the performance, transforming the simple act of watching actors on the stage into a private tableau of exquisite sensation. Their eyes, glances exchanged, spoke volumes, a silent concord of trust, lust, and playful daring.

In this way, the theatre became more than mere entertainment; it became a crucible for their shared pleasure, a delicate balancing act of restraint and indulgence, where each sigh, each shiver, each stolen touch was intensified by the hidden, thrilling risk of discovery. And through it all, Yarosvet maintained his calm, measured dominion, guiding, observing, and drawing from both girls the exquisite obedience and eager complicity that had become their private, intoxicating language.

Early on Saturday morning, Yarosvet summoned a carriage to convey them to the stanitsa of Novocherkassk and back. He spared no expense, wishing the journey to be as comfortable as possible for the girls. A covered phaeton awaited them, its cushions plush, the suspension smooth, promising a comfortable ride over the uneven roads of the Don countryside. The fare, ten rubles, seemed a trivial sum to him, a small price for their comfort and the promise of the adventures that lay ahead.

Taissia and Inga settled into the carriage with quiet anticipation, their eyes bright with curiosity and the thrill of travel, while Yarosvet ensured every detail was attended to — the blankets tucked just so, the reins handled with care, and the route planned to allow them both privacy and scenery alike. The cart, gently rocking over the rutted paths, became a floating enclave of warmth, conversation, and shared excitement, the world outside receding as the wheels carried them steadily toward their destination.

Preliminary calculations suggested that their return — assuming Zlata was fully prepared for the journey and her family would not insist on hosting them at the table — could not be expected for at least six to seven hours. Yarosvet considered this with quiet precision, measuring the span of time against the comfort and endurance of the two girls, and ensuring that every aspect of the excursion would remain agreeable and unhurried.

For the first time in what seemed an age, Yarosvet found himself entirely at liberty, left alone in the quiet of the hotel suite. The usual attentions, the constant, eager presence of Taissia and, of late, Inga, were temporarily withdrawn, and the hours stretched before him with a rare, contemplative freedom. He moved through the rooms with deliberate leisure, noting the familiar arrangement of furniture, the subtle play of morning light across polished surfaces, the faint scent of perfumed air that lingered from the girls' earlier presence.

There was a curious pleasure in the solitude, a gentle luxury in having no demands to anticipate, no need to guide, correct, or entertain. His mind wandered through memories, plans, and reflections, savoring the unbroken silence, punctuated only by the occasional creak of the floorboards or the distant hum of the waking city. In this interval, Yarosvet allowed himself the rare indulgence of thought unshared, of desires considered without immediate action, and of the calm, unhurried measurement of the world at his own pace.

Having finished breakfast before the girls' departure, Yarosvet now stepped out into the streets of Rostov, the morning air crisp and carrying the faint hum of the city stirring to life. By habit more than purpose, his steps led him toward the Don, its waters glinting under the early sun, whispering of possibilities and secrets yet to unfold. The familiar path offered both comfort and curiosity: the markets along the embankment, the idle chatter of dockworkers, the occasional cargo-laden boat drifting slowly downstream, each scene a fleeting story in motion.

The river, ever shifting and unpredictable, seemed to promise novelty with every glance: a sudden swirl of current, the glint of sunlight on a distant mast, the faint scent of damp wood and riverweed. Yarosvet's pace was unhurried, his senses alert to the small details that most would overlook — the subtle change in the wind, the cries of gulls circling overhead, the ripple of water against the hulls of moored vessels. Alone, yet fully engaged with the world around him, he allowed

himself the rare pleasure of unpressured observation, letting the city and the river converse quietly with his thoughts.

As he wandered along the embankment, Yarosvet encountered the small, unpredictable dramas that gave the morning its peculiar charm. A cart laden with fragrant vegetables wobbled dangerously, and he caught the reins just in time to prevent a minor catastrophe, exchanging a brief, amused glance with the harried vendor. Further along, a pair of boys chased a scruffy dog that had snatched a loaf of bread, their shouts mingling with the bark of the creature and the laughter of bystanders. Yarosvet paused a moment to watch the chaos, a faint smile tugging at the corners of his lips, noting the innocent energy of youth unfettered by the weight of the world.

A riverboat, its sails half-lowered, drifted lazily by, and the scent of fresh timber and tar stirred memories of his own youthful excursions. He observed a fisherman deftly casting his line, the hook glinting in the sunlight, and for a brief instant, considered joining in, imagining the quiet satisfaction of a caught fish. Near the quay, a painter perched on a folding stool, capturing the play of light on the rippling water, glanced up and nodded politely; Yarosvet returned the gesture, momentarily admiring the gentle artistry of the scene.

Every step brought him new small encounters: the clatter of a blacksmith at work, the squeak of a wheelbarrow carrying freshly baked loaves, the fleeting glance of a young woman balancing a basket of flowers on her head, her skirt brushing against the cobbles. Each vignette, ordinary yet vivid, filled the hours with an unpredictable rhythm, reminding Yarosvet that even in solitude, the city itself was alive with miniature adventures waiting to be noticed.

He chose a vacant spot on a nearby bench, settling beside two well-dressed gentlemen who were already engaged in animated conversation. He did not strain to catch their words, yet the lilting cadence of laughter and the occasional slurred interjection suggested that both were, by no means, fresh from morning duties — they were, unmistakably, still enlivened by the revelries of the previous evening.

As he sat quietly, observing the subtle play of gestures and expressions, a familiar name brushed past his attention: *Mademoiselle Éléonore*. It was uttered lightly, almost carelessly, yet the syllables struck a chord of recognition. He allowed his gaze to drift lazily over the rippling surface of the river, as if captivated by the gentle sway of the passing boats, while the name lodged itself quietly in his thoughts. The intrigue was immediate — what connection, he wondered, had brought her into the murmurings of these strangers, and under what circumstances had her name entered the murky currents of Rostov gossip?

Yarosvet's attention sharpened, though he remained outwardly relaxed, allowing the murmurs of conversation to wash over him. Gradually, the fragments of their disjointed chatter coalesced into a coherent thread: the two gentlemen were exchanging impressions of a recent performance by *Mademoiselle Éléonore* — an engagement to which she had, in her own fumbling and overtly enthusiastic manner, attempted to entice him the previous week. Her invitation, so clumsy and transparent in its design, had immediately aroused his suspicion, prompting him to decline at the time, though now the echoes of that missed evening teased the corners of his memory.

"Gotta say," slurred the first, leaning so his voice stayed low, "that body... flexible as anything, but she carries herself like she's shy. Strange, eh? She ain't got a thing to hide."

The other snorted. "Aye. I know a painter she posed for not long ago. Said the same — her bashfulness made every bit of her more... alive, more damn striking. You'd think she hasn't the foggiest what she does to people."

The words, though meant for casual admiration, painted in Yarosvet's mind a portrait far more vivid than the gentlemen themselves could imagine, and the memory of her fumbling invitation last week took on a new, intriguing hue.

"Blimey... you could see it all," the first said, voice thick from drink. "Flat belly, nice shoulders... tits firm, round... not a scrap of fat anywhere."

The other laughed, rubbing his chin. “Aye, and those legs — thighs, calves — smooth, tight. Arms too. She moves and you can see every line, every curve. Reckon she’s shy? Nah... can’t hide any of it.”

“Even the arse,” the first added, leaning closer. “Round, tight... and the small of her back dips just right. Bloody hell, she knows what she’s got, even if she tries to act bashful.”

Yarosvet listened, expression neutral, letting the crude admiration settle in his mind, each word conjuring a vivid image he’d otherwise not have dwelt upon. Their blunt fascination sketched for him a picture of her body more frankly than any polite compliment ever could.

“Poor girl, really,” the first muttered, shaking his head.

“Why’s that?” asked the second, squinting. “She’s makin’ a decent coin with all that dancing, ain’t she?”

“Aye... but she’s bound to get herself into trouble sooner or later. Lucky for her we’re halfway decent folk, not fully loaded on drink,” the first said, voice lowering further. “Any other man on our street? Hell, he’d see her there in her flat and... well, best case, he’d force himself on her. Could be much worse.”

“Did you see her arms?” the first slurred, waving a hand vaguely. “Firm, tight... not a scrap of slack anywhere. Makes you think she’s strong as well as... well, you know.”

The second nodded, grinning. “Aye, and those tits... round, just right, not drooping a bit. Could swear you could feel the weight if you touched “em. And her belly — flat, smooth. Nothin’ hiding there.”

The first chuckled. “Don’t forget the legs. Thighs tight, calves solid... and that arse, good lord. Round, firm... She moves, and every line shows. Bashful? Ha! She’s the whole package, even if she pretends she’s shy.”

The second leaned closer, voice dropping. “Lucky for her we’re not total bastards. Any other pair of eyes could’ve... well, it ain’t polite to say here, but you catch me.”

Yarosvet listened quietly, letting the slurred words wash over him. The more he heard, the clearer it became: his suspicion of Éléonore having plotted some mischievous trap for him was entirely misplaced. She seemed... far too innocent for such cunning. Had she truly meant to ensnare him, she would have sent these drunken men in advance, a subtle nudge to guide his ears to their chatter. Yet here he was, by chance, drawn into their conversation by his own steps.

The truth settled in with an unexpected lightness: the danger, if danger there was at all, lay not with him, but with her. The careless exposure of her body, her unguarded performance, had placed her at the mercy of these wayward, overindulged gentlemen. And Yarosvet, as always, took note, cataloguing each detail with a mixture of amusement, calculation, and that familiar, quiet protectiveness.

Yarosvet rose from the bench with deliberate calm, leaving the two inebriated men oblivious to the fact that their careless chatter might well have altered the course of someone’s life. He moved through the bustling streets with measured steps, his mind already turning over the subtle intricacies of what he had just overheard. Soon he arrived at the small jeweller’s shop where he had lingered days before, awaiting the completion of an accessory for Taissia — a delicate, precise item whose creation had first brought him into the acquaintance of the enigmatic, somewhat dubious mademoiselle Éléonore.

The memory of that initial encounter brushed against him with an almost tangible weight: her supple form, her shy yet provocative posture, and the curious mixture of naivety and subtle audacity she had carried. It seemed clear now that whatever charm or danger she possessed lay entirely in her own domain, far removed from any deliberate schemes against him.

Yarosvet settled onto a familiar bench in the small square before the jeweller’s shop, the one where he had waited the last time, his posture relaxed but alert, a quiet sentinel amidst the gentle stir of passersby. The late morning sunlight dappled through the leaves, casting flickering patterns over

his coat and the worn wood of the bench. He neither fidgeted nor glanced repeatedly at the door; patience was his ally, and he trusted in the cadence of fate.

If destiny willed it, mademoiselle Éléonore would appear once more, drifting into his awareness with that mixture of naïveté and latent audacity that had first intrigued him. If not, then so be it — he owed her nothing, nor did he require her compliance to entertain his thoughts. He could wait, observe, and let the currents of chance dictate the encounter, just as he had always done, fully confident that whatever came would arrive in its own measure, neither rushed nor coerced.

The square itself hummed with quiet life: the distant clatter of a carriage, the soft murmur of voices from a nearby café, a dog padding along the cobblestones — all ordinary sounds that contrasted sharply with the tension of expectation coiled tightly in Yarosvet's chest. He closed his eyes for a moment, letting the warmth of the sun and the rhythm of the river's distant murmur settle him, each heartbeat a patient drum, each breath a reminder that some meetings, like fine threads, required only careful, unwavering attention to reveal their intricate patterns.

Yarosvet's mind drifted briefly to the duo of Taissia and Inga, snug within the covered phaeton, gliding along the Don. He imagined their low murmur of voices, the occasional soft laughter, perhaps speculating about Zlata — or, more mischievously, about himself. The gentle sway of the carriage, the muted rumble of wheels along the rugged country track, seemed almost audible in his imagination.

He opened his eyes and there she was. Mademoiselle Éléonore — familiar from that fleeting first encounter — now passed before him, her face carrying the faint flush of anticipation, a subtle, almost imperceptible excitement that animated her composed features. Two elderly gentlemen of respectable bearing accompanied her, their conversation punctuated by occasional chuckles, yet she moved with a grace and poise that distinguished her from them, the large, expressive eyes that had caught his notice before briefly flicking toward him, curious but cautious.

Her modest stature, the neat overcoat, the scarf, and the single braid descending behind her — all spoke of propriety — but Yarosvet discerned beneath this composed exterior the same flicker of vulnerability he had glimpsed before, now mingled with that delicate hint of stirring anticipation. She was, in that precise moment, both anchored in the present and subtly adrift, a figure poised on the threshold between composure and quiet, personal yearning.

She caught sight of him and paused, murmuring something to her companions, whose eyes flicked toward him with mild disapproval. Then, with a slight, teasing wave of her hand, she seemed to beckon him closer. The memory surfaced unbidden — how he had declined her invitation before, yet, in compensation, had given her three rubles, “for your birthday,” as a small gift. There was no reason for resentment; if anything, she could regard him as a friend. Yarosvet rose and approached them.

“Mademoiselle Eleonore,” he said, inclining his head with a subtle flourish, “what a delightful encounter! I see your admirers’ ranks have grown.” He offered a courteous nod toward the gentlemen at her side.

She returned his greeting with a bright smile, her voice carrying a note of expectation. “I am equally pleased to see you, sir,” she said, “and I trust that today you will not refuse me — will you join us?”

Without waiting for more, she slipped her arm through his, a playful but confident gesture, and together they continued along the street, the four of them moving in easy camaraderie.

As they ambled along the sunlit street, he teased lightly, “At this rate, Mademoiselle, you ought to be opening your own theatre. I heard whispers of you down by the riverbank today.”

She paused, pleasantly taken aback, a hint of a smile curving her lips. “Truly? How kind of you to share such news,” she murmured, the warmth in her voice reflecting genuine appreciation.

He chose to say no more, refraining from identifying the source, lest he unsettle her before her performance.

After a thoughtful beat, she tilted her head and asked, “And how much longer do you intend to remain in our city?”

He shrugged with the faintest ease, a measured patience in his gaze. “I have not yet decided. Much depends upon circumstance,” he replied, leaving the future deliberately undefined, the uncertainty hanging lightly between them like a whispered promise.

As they strolled, she leaned a fraction closer, her voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. “And... may I ask, how ought I address you, now that I am presenting you as an acquaintance of mine?”

He allowed a faint, almost imperceptible smile to tug at the corners of his lips. “As you wish, mademoiselle,” he replied, his tone calm, measured. “Mister Zorich will suffice.”

She murmured his name under her breath, letting it linger on her lips as though savoring its sound, a quiet affirmation that he was to be remembered. Then, with a playful flourish, she announced to all, “We have arrived!”

They passed beneath the deep archway of the building, yet instead of entering the open courtyard, she guided them through a narrow, almost hidden door set into the thick wall. The space beyond was unmistakably a former service room — low ceiling, rough stone floor, the faint scent of aged timber lingering in the air. Yet its modesty lent an unexpected intimacy, a sense of seclusion that invited them in.

She laughed softly, the sound carrying a subtle thrill, and waved her hand around. “No stairs to climb,” she quipped, “so let us call this a convenience rather than a detour.” The walls seemed to close around them, muffling the outside world, and the flickering light from a single lantern cast gentle shadows across their faces. In that quiet, tucked-away corner of the building, the bustle of the city felt impossibly distant, leaving only the four of them, their whispered words and shared glances marking the space as their own secret refuge.

The room was lit by three small windows set high beneath the ceiling. Were it not for the low height, one could almost call the space roomy. Two old screens, adorned with Eastern motifs, divided the area, acting as already drawn-back curtains. There was no stage. Four mismatched chairs, worn and barely intact, stood with their backs to the door, which the young woman locked swiftly, her gesture gentle and cautionary.

Seating himself in the farthest chair, Yarosvet, by long habit, surveyed his surroundings and found nothing in them to arouse suspicion. It was hardly conceivable that behind the faded screens lurked cut-throats, poised to spring upon unwary visitors at the slightest signal. The key she had left in the lock, doubtless so she might flee at once should danger threaten her; yet, by the same token, it ensured that no intruder could push his way in unbidden from without.

The young woman drew her guests’ attention to the chill in the room, adding lightly that, should they wish to remove their coats, there was a stand by the door. One of the gentlemen, with a half-smile, wondered aloud whether it might not prove too cold for her. She laughed, replying that she was already accustomed to it — besides, unlike them, she would be moving about. She herself shed her coat and scarf, leaving them neatly on the stand, and offered an apology for not yet having had the chance to make the place properly comfortable.

“Art is always a work in progress,” remarked the second gentleman with a wry twist of the lips. She accepted the quip with good humour and went on to caution them that what awaited was but a brief programme, composed of two parts, in which she would strive to please them as much as she could — so that, having once come, they might return again and bring their friends along as well.

At the outset, Yarosvet harboured no expectations beyond a passing curiosity. Yet, as Mademoiselle Éléonore made her way behind the screen, she struck a match and set a dozen unassuming candles alight; their trembling flames soon suffused the room with an amber half-darkness, softening the rough edges and lending the space an exotic, secretive hush.

From behind the screen came the hurried rustle of garments being shed. The two men exchanged knowing glances, wearing the complacent expressions of well-fed tomcats.

Then came a delicate chiming, light and crystalline, followed by the measured tread of bare feet upon the rough stone floor. From behind the painted screens emerged Mademoiselle Eleonore, her appearance transformed. Now she was clad in a shimmering costume of pearly hue: a close-fitted bodice that cupped and upheld the surprisingly full curves of her bosom, and flowing oriental trousers that fell to her ankles, leaving her feet unshod. Between the two garments her bare, toned stomach was revealed, feminine in contour yet firm from training, the hollow of her navel deep as if sculpted by deliberate hand. Her hair, still gathered in its single braid, swayed against her back with every step. In her hands she bore a tambourine, the source of that bright ringing. Halting between the two screens, she lifted it high above her head, struck its rim with her small fist, and, with a sudden spark of life in her gaze, surrendered herself to the dance.

Yarosvet's eyes followed her every movement, tracing the sinuous grace of her lithe form as she yielded to the rhythm of the tambourine. Each tilt, each subtle sway of her hips, seemed both deliberate and effortless, as if her body were a single, pliant instrument attuned to the percussive pulse in her hands. She bent low in a controlled squat, rising with a gentle spring, the arch of her back and the extension of her limbs forming a silent, unspoken poetry. When she paused, poised on the balls of her feet, the tension in her muscles hinted at a coiled energy, a fire restrained only by the elegance of her performance.

Her torso twisted with precision, revealing the sculpted lines of her abdomen, firm yet supple, each rib and curve accentuated in the amber glow of the candles. Her arms moved in measured arcs, the tambourine ringing a bright, clear note with every flick, every tap, harmonizing with the subtle shiver of her shoulders and the roll of her hips. There was a cadence in her gestures, a fluidity that made each transition — each dip, turn, and gentle rebound — appear inevitable, as if the music had been born from her very body.

For a moment, Yarosvet's mind drifted to memories of Liza in Pavlovsk, her delicate ballerina form illuminated by lamplight, every note of the piano under his fingers matched by the poetry of her movement. Yet here, before him, this young acrobat outshone even that delicate vision. Her energy was more contained yet more potent, her mastery of restraint only intensifying the magnetism of every motion. Each jump, each spiral, each poised stillness spoke not merely of skill but of a vivid, subtle sensuality that kindled both admiration and fascination within him.

And as the tambourine's clear chime echoed through the low-ceilinged room, Yarosvet could not tear his eyes away. The interplay of control and abandon, of pliancy and precision, created a harmony that was both visual and intimate, a dance of body and spirit that seemed to bind the air itself to her lithe, gleaming form. The fire beneath her measured grace promised a depth beyond the eye's immediate capture, and he, seated quietly yet utterly engaged, drank in the sight with a composed intensity that barely contained the stirrings of his appreciation.

She sprang and arched, paused and pivoted, the flickering candlelight tracing the contours of her bare abdomen, the gentle swell of her hips, and the firm line of her thighs. Her arms moved with deliberate sinuosity, striking the tambourine in measured taps that punctuated the rhythm of her body, each gesture harmonising with the next in a seamless cadence. Even in restraint, there was an unmistakable fire in the precision of her bends and lifts, a quiet intensity that spoke of both strength and feminine agility. Every twist of her torso, every subtle recoil from the floor, every poised stillness suggested a balance between discipline and passion, a silent language of control and latent desire, captivating in its direct, unembellished honesty.

She moved closer to each of her three spectators in turn, her body undulating with a fluid, deliberate sinuosity that brought her tantalisingly near their legs. Yarosvet felt a heat rising within him, an undeniable stirring of desire at the controlled, intimate rhythm of her approach. The two older gentlemen, though outwardly composed, betrayed themselves with faint flushes creeping across their cheeks, the tension in their posture betraying the private agitation her proximity elicited. Every subtle twist of her hips, every measured pause as she hovered almost within reach, amplified the

charged atmosphere of the room, the soft jingle of the tambourine punctuating the quiet, simmering energy that the dance invoked.

Maintaining the rhythm and fluidity of her dance, she turned her back to the first spectator, teasingly swivelling her hips in full view. The man, finally understanding what was expected, reached out, placing his hands gently on her undulating hips, and began to gingerly draw down the edges of her pantaloons. As her rounded flesh revealed itself halfway, she stepped lightly out of his grasp, moving toward the next chair, and turned to face the second gentleman. Following his companion's lead, he grasped the edges of her garments and cautiously slid them lower, unveiling not only the entirety of her toned abdomen but also the first glimpses of the dark hair hidden at her mons.

She stepped back from him as well, but not toward Yarosvet — instead, retreating toward the screens, offering all three men an uninterrupted view of her partially undraped form. The pantaloons clung to her hips with a teasing tension, appearing on the verge of slipping with every twist and turn, yet stubbornly holding. She spun gracefully before them, the tambourine's chime punctuating each motion, alternately revealing the deep cleft between her half-exposed buttocks and the dark shadow beneath her bare abdomen, her every movement a careful balance of restraint and fiery allure.

At last, she approached Yarosvet in her dance with a teasing smile, allowing him to draw the pantaloons fully down. He slid them off to her knees and paused, giving her the moment to extend her long, toned legs one by one. Now fully bare below, she resumed her sinuous movements, spinning and swaying with effortless grace, drifting away and returning, a hypnotic rhythm that kept her enraptured audience utterly captivated.

She spun before them in a hypnotic rhythm, each twirl and sway of her hips accentuating the supple, lithe curves of her body. Her braid, swinging like a pendulum with every turn, traced arcs through the dim amber light, a dark ribbon punctuating the motion of her bare back and shoulders. The small, shadowed patch of hair beneath her abdomen — dark and dense against the pale skin — caught the flickering candlelight, a subtle but insistent signal of her unashamed femininity, drawing the eye even as the tambourine's chime guided her measured, sensuous steps across the rough stone floor.

Her small, expressive feet traced delicate arcs across the floor, ankles flexing with graceful precision, the subtle tension of her calves and the gentle swell of her shins revealing a dancer's training. Strong, slender thighs moved with fluid power, leading to the taut muscles of her buttocks that tensed and relaxed in perfect synchrony with her rhythmic spins. Each turn showcased the elegant architecture of her lower body — ankles, calves, thighs, and glutes working in harmonious concert, a living testament to suppleness, strength, and disciplined artistry, all illuminated by the flickering amber light that danced across her bare skin.

Mademoiselle Éléonore, having drawn the spectators' eyes and imaginations into the rhythm of her dance, now allowed her steps to carry her deliberately closer, one by one, to each of them. She moved with the fluidity of a vessel of liquid silk, her bare feet whispering against the rough stone floor, heels lifting, toes bending, the subtle arching of her insteps catching the amber candlelight in a delicate gleam. The first gentleman, seated closest to the door, shifted slightly in his chair as she approached, the soft sway of her hips prefiguring the measured intimacy of her proximity. With a playful tilt of her head and a glance that suggested both invitation and control, she allowed him to reach out, his hand tentative yet drawn irresistibly toward the gentle curve of her waist.

As his fingers traced the smooth line of her hip, Éléonore responded with a slow, deliberate undulation, the subtle roll of her stomach muscles beneath the candlelight making the contact electric. Her pelvis arched ever so slightly, a signal of the rhythm coursing through her, her spine bending and straightening with an elegance that made every nerve in the observer's hand conscious of the supple tension beneath the skin. The tambourine remained aloft in her other hand, each chime marking a beat in which her body seemed to hum with restrained vitality, controlled yet profoundly alive. Her

thighs, long and toned, flexed as she lowered and rose, calves contracting in subtle ripples, the small muscles around her ankles tightening with each delicate pivot on her toes.

Once the first spectator's hands had lingered just long enough to register the soft give of her flesh, she pivoted on the balls of her feet, the turn seamless, and drifted toward the second gentleman. The change in proximity did not break the cadence of her movement; rather, it heightened it, her body a continuous line of motion, tracing invisible arcs between the candlelight and the shadows. She allowed him to place his hands against the warm, firm curve of her hip and the gentle swell of her rear, her flesh yielding just enough to affirm the contact, yet retreating subtly with the measured sway of her own volition. The tendons in her calves flexed as she bent, knees tracking in a graceful squat, then extended with the softness of a springing bow. Her abdomen twisted with deliberate control, the muscles beneath her skin taut and responsive, drawing the observer's gaze to the interplay of sinew and soft curvature.

She lingered for a heartbeat, letting his hands explore the tactile landscape of her body, and then, with the lightest pressure of her palm against the tambourine, drew a clear, crystalline chime into the room. It marked the transition, a punctuation of both rhythm and intent. Without haste, she drifted toward Yarosvet, the final and most deliberate movement in the circuit of her dance. Each step was measured; her feet barely whispered against the floor, and her long, toned legs seemed to float freely in the amber light, every muscle defined and lithe, unencumbered by any fabric. Her arms traced elegant arcs, guiding the tambourine's song with the precision of a conductor, even as her body invited tactile attention.

Yarosvet, seated, felt a shift in the air — the intimacy of proximity coupled with the discipline of her artistry. He placed his hands against the curves of her hips, feeling the taut yet yielding flesh beneath, the subtle twitch of muscle as she twisted with precision, and the gentle firmness of her thighs as she bent slightly, letting him explore within the bounds she allowed. Her movements were both an offering and a test, a delicate negotiation of control: she swayed, arched, and rolled her torso with a sinuous rhythm that drew attention to the gentle swell of her buttocks, the small hollow at the base of her spine, the elegant taper of her calves, all while maintaining a poise that forbade roughness.

Her dance became a dialogue, each step and gesture a carefully constructed sentence. She allowed the first man's fingers to trace once more over the curve of her hip as she pivoted away, then slid along to the second, before returning to Yarosvet, spinning lightly on her toes, the braid swinging like a pendulum. Every undulation of her pelvis, every gentle extension of her legs, communicated the duality of yielding and command, the slow reveal of form and flesh, the hypnotic cadence of interaction that made the spectators part of the dance while remaining wholly subject to her art. The tambourine rang intermittently, a silver thread weaving through the amber shadows, marking the rhythm of a dance at once intimate and unassailably controlled, each movement a celebration of the body's pliancy, the power of subtle seduction, and the artistry of deliberate exposure.

By the time she had completed her circuit, each spectator had felt the warmth and firmness of her form, each nerve and sinew made vividly present through touch and gaze, yet she remained untouchable in her ultimate command, a lithe conductor of both sight and sensation, leaving Yarosvet and the two gentlemen suspended in a haze of admiration, desire, and the unspoken acknowledgment of her mastery.

Éléonore shifted the rhythm, lowering herself deliberately into a squat, her back toward the first gentleman. The soft bend of her knees, the gentle spreading of her thighs, and the arch of her spine drew every eye to the contours of her torso. Muscles flexed subtly beneath her pale skin, ribs tracing quiet lines across her abdomen, while the swell of her hips rose and fell with the pulse of her controlled movement. The first man, now fully understanding the implicit invitation of her posture, reached forward and released the clasps of her bodice. Her body responded to the release with a slight shiver of anticipation, the subtle sway of her shoulders and the arch of her back enhancing the allure of her offering.

Rising smoothly from the squat, she pivoted with the grace of a cat and approached the second gentleman, seating herself in the same deliberate fashion, this time facing him directly. Her torso was upright, chest lifted, the subtle tension of her stomach muscles visible as they flexed beneath the candlelight. Her arms, extending slightly to maintain the cadence of the tambourine, highlighted the delicate sculpting of her biceps and forearms. The second gentleman, guided by the visual prompt of her poised posture, gently slid the straps of her bodice down her shoulders. The fabric fell with a whisper, revealing the full curve of her breasts, the soft swell giving way to firm muscle beneath, the nipples subtly catching the glow of the flickering flames.

Without hesitation, Éléonore shifted closer to Yarosvet, her movements fluid and hypnotic, allowing him the opportunity to unclasp the final fastening. His fingers brushed against her warm skin, tracing the gentle curve from the underbust to the soft swell of her waist. With a quiet exhalation, she was freed from the last confines of her bodice, standing fully revealed, the entirety of her form now exposed to the flickering candlelight and the enraptured gaze of her audience. Her arms raised in a measured arc, guiding the tambourine, accentuated the graceful elongation of her torso and the taut lines of her abdomen, the hollow of her navel deep and shaded, drawing the eye down to the subtle dark hair beneath.

Now completely bare, Éléonore resumed her sinuous, undulating movements, each step, each sway, each twist of her torso carefully modulated to maintain a mesmerizing cadence. Her hips rolled with a deliberate sensuality, thighs flexing and calves tightening with every subtle squat and pivot. The tambourine's bright, crystalline notes punctuated each motion, marking the rhythm of a dance that was at once intimate and artistically restrained. She arched, bent, and extended, the arch of her back highlighting the curve of her buttocks, the gentle indentation at the base of her spine, and the fine musculature of her legs. Every gesture spoke of precision and control, a silent dialogue of power and allure that held the spectators in thrall.

Approaching each man once more, she danced in a manner that combined vulnerability with mastery, her body a supple instrument responding to the percussion of her own hand. She hovered, pivoted, and recoiled with the soft resilience of a spring, letting each observer witness the tension and release, the ebb and flow of muscle beneath unblemished skin. Her braid swung in measured arcs, the dark ribbon tracing a hypnotic pattern that accentuated the line of her bare back and shoulders. The interplay of shadow and light across her fully nude form created a choreography of both body and spirit, a visual symphony of curves, flexing muscles, and controlled abandon that left Yarosvet and the two gentlemen utterly captivated.

Every subtle tilt of her pelvis, every gentle squat and rise, every roll of her shoulders, served not merely as a display of physical skill but as a deliberate, intimate narrative. The tambourine's chime threaded through the room, guiding her measured steps while echoing in the minds of the spectators, binding them to the hypnotic cadence of her fully liberated form. Even now, completely bare, Éléonore retained the absolute mastery of her performance: each movement was art, each gesture a declaration of control, and each glance a promise of the hypnotic intimacy that could never be seized by haste or roughness. The room itself seemed suspended, the candlelight flickering over bare skin and taut muscles, the soft jingle of the tambourine a metronome to the dance of flesh and spirit that she alone conducted.

Éléonore continued her dance with a deliberate, intoxicating cadence, approaching each of her spectators in turn. Her long, lithe form moved with fluid sinuosity, tilting and bending, allowing the first gentleman to place his hands upon the generous curves of her breasts, full and yielding despite the slender elegance of her body. The subtle swell of flesh shifted beneath his touch, rising and falling with the rhythm of her torso, while the nipples, darkened and slightly puckered — whether by the cool air or the flicker of desire — beckoned the eye with a quiet, insistent insistence. She allowed his exploration only as long as her whim permitted, a silent command of control that lent each touch the weight of her unspoken authority.

She straightened gracefully, drifting toward the second gentleman, repeating the measured intimacy, the rise and fall of her breasts, the tilt of her shoulders, the gentle curve of her back and spine, guiding his hands along her supple form. Each contact was fleeting, precise, an exchange of sensation and restraint. Her eyes met theirs briefly, a spark of playful dominion, as if to remind them that the dance dictated the terms of engagement.

When at last she moved to Yarosvet, her pace slowed just enough to let the tension stretch deliciously. She lingered, chest lifted, the amber light tracing the taut yet supple line of her torso. He let his hands rest upon her breasts, exploring the warmth and softness under his touch. Unlike the others, she permitted him a lingering, a measured indulgence that held the promise of more. When he finally released them, Éléonore did not step away; her body remained poised, head tilted back, lips parting in a soft, amused laugh. He understood instantly: an invitation. With a gentle, almost reverent gesture, he reached forward, and she settled atop his hand, seated with a measured grace, the tambourine still ringing and punctuating her every sway.

Her movements atop him were a symphony of control and abandon. She shifted slightly, letting the natural weight of her hips and thighs brush against his palm, the gentle tilt of her pelvis emphasizing the hollow of her abdomen and the subtle dark hair beneath. Her spine arched in perfect rhythm, shoulders rising and falling in harmony with the chime of the tambourine. Every twitch, every careful roll of muscle spoke of power restrained, of passion measured and artfully displayed.

The two other men watched with a mixture of envy and anticipation, believing the same intimacy would soon be theirs. Yet Éléonore, in her mastery of the dance, allowed herself to drift from their reach, stepping lightly and retreating behind the second screen. The tambourine's chime ceased abruptly, leaving only the flickering candlelight to trace the memory of her curves and the lingering tension in the room. The men's applause, hesitant at first, soon rang out, a tribute to the hypnotic artistry they had witnessed, tinged with frustration at the denial of their desired touch.

Yarosvet, meanwhile, remained still, holding the memory of her warmth, the supple grace of her bare form, and the intoxicating rhythm of a dance that had drawn him into a private, unspoken intimacy. The space between them now seemed charged, alive with the echo of the tambourine and the shadow of her absent, yet palpably present, body. Éléonore's artistry had commanded both gaze and touch, leaving behind an indelible impression of controlled abandon, a ballet of flesh and intent, and a spell that no applause could entirely dispel.

From behind the second screen, where she had retreated moments before, a gramophone began to play, its crackling strains spilling into the room with a lively, resonant composition. Éléonore reemerged, her form still completely bare, the pale skin of her body catching the amber glow of the candlelight. This time, her performance was not a dance in the traditional sense, but an exhibition of raw acrobatic skill, a lithe, fluid display designed to celebrate the supple, astonishing flexibility of her nude body.

She moved with the ease of water, hands descending to the stone floor as she flipped gracefully into a handstand. Muscles along her shoulders, arms, and spine flexed and gleamed, each sinew visible beneath the warm light, the gentle arch of her back tracing a perfect curve. From this elevated position, she shifted into a wide split, the smooth line of her inner thighs revealed in stark, intimate clarity. Her abdomen, firm yet yielding, rippled subtly with the effort, highlighting the delicate planes of her toned torso and the shallow hollow of her navel.

Sliding smoothly into a backbend, she formed a bridge, the curve of her spine precise and elegant, her breasts lifted slightly, nipples catching the flickering light, the dark shadow of her pubic hair framing the subtle line of her pelvis. She rolled through a sun pose, arms extended, legs outstretched, toes pointed, the motion displaying the perfect symmetry of her limbs and the taut, supple line of her thighs. With effortless control, she executed a series of tumbles and flips, each turn revealing the flex of her calves, the arc of her buttocks, and the taut definition of her abdomen.

Every muscle engaged, yet the movement retained a sense of fluid grace, as if her body were both instrument and melody.

The gramophone spun its two-minute tale, and through it all Éléonore maintained a rhythm of elegance and controlled power. The room seemed to shrink around the spectacle of her naked, sinuous body, each acrobatic feat a demonstration not merely of skill but of the exquisite harmony of flesh, bone, and intent.

As the final notes crackled to silence, she rose, drawing herself up with slow, deliberate grace. She bowed deeply, the pale curve of her back arched, head inclined, hair cascading over her shoulders. The applause echoed through the low-ceilinged room, and a murmur of anticipation arose as she was called “for an encore.” Responding with a playful glint in her eyes, she arched into a bridge once more, hands and feet planted firmly, spine curving elegantly. In that poised position, she began to move slowly before the audience, her hips swaying with deliberate tension, the firm lines of her breasts, stomach, and pelvis highlighted in every subtle movement.

Spectators’ hands followed instinctively, tracing the taut contours of her nude form. Fingers skimmed across the firm swell of her breasts, down the soft yet defined plane of her abdomen, along the gentle curve of her mons, and caressed the toned breadth of her thighs. Every contact was met with the careful, controlled rhythm of her posture; she neither recoiled nor surrendered, maintaining perfect command of her body while allowing the audience to feel, to explore the lines of flesh she had so deliberately displayed.

Finally, with a graceful lift of her torso and a smooth step out of the bridge, Éléonore straightened fully, bowing once again to the spectators. Her skin glowed faintly in the candlelight, muscles relaxed yet still defined, the curve of her hips and the subtle rise of her chest a final, lingering testament to the artistry she had unveiled. The performance was complete, the room steeped in the memory of her acrobatic mastery, and the audience, captivated, could only applaud, aware that they had witnessed not merely a display of the body, but a consummate exhibition of control, elegance, and beauty.

Éléonore straightened fully after her final bow, the pale, supple lines of her body relaxed yet still luminous in the candlelight. She lifted her gaze to the assembled spectators, eyes sparkling with quiet amusement and warmth, and addressed them with measured grace. “Thank you for watching,” she said, her voice soft yet clear, carrying a hint of playful intimacy. “I hope my modest — not so modest — performance has left a lasting impression. Perhaps you will return, and maybe even bring friends to share in the spectacle I offer.” She let her words linger in the air, tilting her hips ever so slightly, chest rising and falling with the gentle rhythm of her breath, as if her very posture underscored the invitation she had extended.

She added, with a hint of mischievous confidence, that she could be found each day upon the square, performing as she was, unadorned and unashamed, for any who cared to witness her art. Then, with the same fluid ease that had guided her movements all evening, she approached the door, her bare feet barely whispering against the stone floor, and deftly unlocked it. The two gentlemen, still flushed from the intensity of the evening, their knees weak beneath them, shuffled sideways toward the exit, eyes averted, lips sealed, caught between lingering desire and the decorum of civility.

Yarosvet hesitated for the briefest moment, aware that he had not yet paid, and in that pause he saw her turn the key once more, firmly locking the door behind the departing gentlemen. The soft click of the bolt echoed through the room, a clear signal that they were now entirely alone. Éléonore remained poised, a luminous figure framed by the low amber light, her gaze teasing, patient, yet commanding — an unspoken question hanging in the air, an invitation to the private continuation of her evening’s performance?

Standing by the door, entirely bare and moving as if her nudity were of no consequence, Éléonore lifted her gaze to him, eyes glinting with a mix of amusement and sincerity. “Thank you for your support,” she said softly, voice lilting, “I must confess, I enjoyed myself today — myself, and

the... atmosphere.” She tilted her head, a playful yet candid glance that sought his reaction. “And you? Did you enjoy it?”

Yarosvet, remaining by his chair and careful not to approach too closely, met her gaze with composed admiration. “I was utterly captivated,” he said earnestly. “You have a rare and undeniable talent.” At the same time, he retrieved his wallet from his coat pocket and placed a note upon the arm of his chair. Éléonore’s eyes fell to it, noting with a flicker of surprise and embarrassment that it was ten rubles.

Her delicate fingers took his hand in hers, brushing lightly over his knuckles. “This is far too much,” she murmured, cheeks tinged with pink.

He smiled gently, the lines of his face softened by the warmth of his sincerity. “You deserve far more than this,” he replied.

For a moment, she seemed almost hesitant, then leaned in, her soft body brushing lightly against him as she pressed close. “May I...?” she asked in a whisper, as though seeking permission for the smallest act of intimacy. He inclined his head and assured her, “I shall not mind.”

With that, she rose lightly onto the balls of her feet, tilting her head, and pressed her lips to his. Her form was supple and warm, and he supported her delicately beneath the elbows, feeling the gentle weight of her body against his hands. When she drew back, her gaze sparkled with an unfamiliar curiosity. “I have never kissed a bearded man,” she whispered, voice playful yet tinged with wonder.

Before he could respond, her lips found his once more, this time not in gratitude but with a deliberate tenderness, a kiss that carried the weight of awakening desire, the quiet thrill of a boundary crossed for the first time. She lingered, shifting slightly against him, each movement precise yet unforced, an eloquent declaration of the private, unspoken intensity now shared between them.

Yarosvet did not respond as a lover might; he did not press forward, did not claim her lips, but rather permitted the kiss as one allows a tender intrusion, neither encouraging nor resisting. Éléonore sensed it at once. A faint shiver passed through her as she withdrew, her eyes clouded with sudden embarrassment.

“Forgive me,” she whispered, voice unsteady.

“For what?” he asked quietly, his gaze steady, almost bewildered by her sudden contrition.

“For thinking that you... that I...” She faltered, words tumbling over themselves, her cheeks flushed with shame. “For letting myself believe, even for a moment — oh, it was foolish of me.” She turned her face aside, hiding the confusion that burned within her, ashamed of the impulsive boldness that had carried her beyond the invisible line she thought he might share.

Yet she did not move from his arms. Barefoot, naked, her skin already prickling with the faint chill of the room, she lingered there against him, fragile and a little pitiful in her sudden loss of confidence. Yarosvet, almost without realising, drew her closer, his embrace not passionate but protective, as though his body might shield her from the draught and her own unease.

“What is your real name?” he asked softly, bending his head toward her.

For a moment she hesitated, as if reluctant to let go of the illusion, then answered in a quiet, steady tone.

He studied her face, the sincerity in her eyes, and after a pause inquired again, “And how many years have you?”

She gave the number simply, with neither coquetry nor concealment, standing barefoot in his hold, her body pressed to his for warmth, her candour almost childlike in its unguarded honesty.

“What is your real name?” he asked quietly, still holding her against him as though to warm her chilled skin.

She faltered a moment, then whispered: “Elena... Lena.”

He repeated it softly, as if trying it on his tongue: “Lena.” And after a pause, with a faint half-smile: “And you are nineteen, still?”

“Yes,” she answered simply, her voice low, her eyes lowered.

Barefoot, unclothed, a little shivering from the cool air yet not leaving his embrace, she appeared fragile, uncertain, almost pitiful — and at the same time strangely touching.

“How many clients do you usually receive in a day?” he asked, his tone calm, almost clinical, though his arm still held her against him.

“It depends,” she answered with a faint shrug, her breath brushing his chest. “Sometimes five... sometimes none at all. Today I have been lucky.”

“Do you never fear?”

She looked up at him, puzzled. “Fear what?”

“That men — especially when faced with a naked beauty — might lose their heads. And that your light-hearted daring could cost you dearly.”

Her eyes lifted fully to his, searching, vulnerable yet proud. “You truly think I am... a beauty?”

He bent down then, unhesitating, his beard brushing her lips as he kissed her. And when he drew back, his voice was low but unfeigned: “Yours is the most beautiful, the most eloquent body I have seen in a long time.”

She looked at him with wide, admiring eyes, then her gaze softened into something more thoughtful. “Perhaps I should feel flattered,” she said quietly, “for surely a man like you must see many naked women all the time.”

He smiled, arching one brow. “And why do you think that?”

Her cheeks tinged with pink. “Because... you seem very attractive to me,” she admitted, voice low. “I noticed it the first time I saw you last week.”

He regarded her steadily, without interrupting.

“And... I like you very much,” she added, a little rush of colour rising across her neck. “And... somehow, when I am with you, I do not feel at all shy about being... naked.”

“You are... almost right about women,” he said softly, a faint amusement in his voice. “But at the moment, I have a little time before the evening. I could take you, let us say, to lunch, if you do not mind. I would like to know more about you.”

Her face lit up instantly, eyes sparkling. “Oh, thank you!” she exclaimed, and, unable to contain her joy, she ran toward the screen to dress.

Lena approached it with a subtle, teasing lift of her head, her bare feet barely touching the cool floor as she gave it a gentle nudge. The screen shuddered and toppled with a soft clatter. She threw back her head and laughed, the sound ringing bright in the intimate room, a musical punctuation to her little theatre of movement. Yarosvet stood close by, observing with measured attention, his hands resting lightly at his sides, a silent witness to her lively display.

She bent gracefully to retrieve her small, delicately embroidered boots, the worn leather faintly gleaming in the candlelight. Slipping each foot into its snug enclosure, she flexed her ankles, testing the fit with a careful twist of her toes, the lines of her slender legs tracing gentle arcs as she moved. The motion was precise yet fluid, a combination of practical dexterity and unspoken elegance.

Next came her chemise, a soft cotton garment that she drew over her head, letting it slip down to her knees. As the fabric settled, it gently veiled the swell of her breasts, concealing the firm peaks that had caught the candlelight moments before. Her slender shoulders and upper arms were hidden under its folds, yet the lightness of the material allowed every subtle movement of her body to be glimpsed, a whispered echo of the form beneath.

She stepped into her drawers, guiding them up over her hips. In the brief moment of their ascent, the curve of her buttocks, the shadowed sweep of hair at her mons, disappeared beneath the fine cotton. She adjusted the waistband, smoothing the edges, and the garment embraced her with a quiet intimacy, hiding yet hinting, covering what had been laid bare with a gentle, teasing precision.

Her corset followed, laced up with careful, deliberate motions. As she tightened it, the garment hugged her waist and sides, pressing softly against the contours of her torso. The gentle curve of her waist was now veiled beneath the structured fabric, the corset smoothing the lines of her torso while

leaving only a hint of the supple form beneath. Each tug of the laces reshaped the silhouette, shaping yet concealing, a layer of disciplined elegance over her supple nudity.

She lifted the petticoat and stepped into it, letting the voluminous folds fall over her hips and thighs. The billowing layers veiled the lower rise of her body, masking the soft shadows of her thighs and the delicate slope of her buttocks. Every movement caused the cotton to sway and brush lightly against her legs, a rustling whisper of modesty that was at once practical and intimate.

Finally, she donned her dress. She stepped into the skirt first, the fabric sliding smoothly over the petticoat, covering what had remained hidden until now. The bodice followed, drawn snugly over the corset, the neckline tracing the gentle curve of her shoulders, hiding the last hints of the firm peaks that had stirred desire moments before. Each fold, each adjustment, was executed with a dancer's grace, and as the dress settled over her form, the layers of cotton and silk concealed her bare body while preserving the memory of every motion she had performed for her audience.

She drew her outer coat over her shoulders. The rich material draped heavily, contrasting with the lightness of the garments beneath, yet she allowed the front to fall slightly open, a casual reveal of the careful arrangement underneath. With a glance toward Yarosvet that mingled mischief and delight, she smoothed the coat with a gentle hand, lingering for a moment as if imprinting the sensation of fabric against skin before completing the ritual of dressing.

By now, Yarosvet had walked around the room and extinguished each of the trembling candle flames. Shadows pooled in the corners, leaving the space steeped in soft darkness.

Elena smiled softly, slipping her hand into his as they made their way to the door. "Thank you," she murmured, her voice warm yet lightly playful. Together they stepped beneath the archway, and she turned back briefly to fasten the lock behind them, the click of the key echoing faintly in the quiet space.

"Am I... am I troubling you with my presence?" she asked once they emerged into the open air of the square, her gaze lifting to his with a mixture of curiosity and self-consciousness.

"Stop fretting over trifles," he replied gently, his tone measured, confident. "I am master of my own affairs — and of those women whom fate brings before me. No one will glance at me askance."

He studied her briefly, a quiet, approving gleam in his eyes. "And tell me," he continued, "where would you like to go? I confess I do not yet know the city as well as you, so I shall follow your lead."

She squeezed his hand lightly, a shy smile flickering across her features. "I... I am relatively new here myself," she admitted, lowering her eyes for a moment. "Not exactly a local."

With that, she led him forward, her steps measured yet full of life, and he followed, content to be guided by her through streets and alleys that still carried the quiet hum of midday, the soft clarity of sunlight casting gentle shadows across the square.

Elena guided him until they reached a small café tucked into a corner of the square. Its simple awning and modest tables suggested a place frequented by locals seeking a quick bite, and Yarosvet immediately sensed that this was a familiar haunt for her. He smiled faintly, his gaze assessing the scene.

"This looks... comfortable enough," he said gently, his tone warm, "but perhaps we might trust to Providence and find somewhere more fitting for a proper meal, rather than merely a snack."

Elena looked up at him, a trace of surprise flickering in her eyes, quickly replaced by a playful tilt of her head. "You mean somewhere... nicer?" she asked, her voice light, almost teasing.

"Precisely," he replied, inclining his head. "I would like to dine where the food and the surroundings are worthy of the occasion — and of my companion."

Her lips curved into a bright, approving smile. "Then lead the way," she said, taking a step beside him, her hand brushing lightly against his as they turned back toward the streets, the sun casting gentle highlights across her hair and the soft folds of her dress.

They soon came upon the first restaurant that caught their eyes, a modest façade with a painted sign swinging gently above the door. In the entrance stood a rotund man, his round belly prominent beneath a slightly stained apron, calling out to passersby with hearty enthusiasm.

Yarovet slowed, a faint smile on his lips, and engaged the man in a casual, easy conversation. “Good afternoon,” he said pleasantly. “What might you recommend for a proper meal?”

The chef’s eyes brightened immediately. “Ah, signore!” he exclaimed, his voice rich with a thick Italian accent. “You are in luck! I offer the finest Italian menu, fresh, delicate, made with care! You will not be disappointed!”

Elena glanced at Yarovet, amusement sparkling in her eyes, and he gave a slight nod, the faintest encouragement. They stepped inside together. The dining hall was almost empty, the sunlight filtering through the tall windows revealing polished tables set neatly with white cloths and silverware.

“Ah,” the chef explained, following them in, “we have opened only recently. The local patrons... they have not yet discovered the pleasures of our cuisine. But you, signore, will have the first taste!”

Yarovet inclined his head with a small smile, taking in the quiet space, the neatness of the interior, and the gentle promise of a leisurely, unhurried meal. Elena, walking beside him, seemed delighted by the novelty, her curiosity mingling with the faint thrill of the day’s unfolding adventures.

Elena guided Yarovet to a small table by the window, where sunlight streamed in, illuminating the simple elegance of the white cloth and polished silverware. They settled into their chairs, the street outside providing a gentle backdrop of midday bustle, distant voices, and the occasional rumble of carriage wheels.

“I leave the choice to you,” Yarovet said, his tone light, yet carrying a quiet authority. “Let the chef surprise us.”

The rotund Italian’s eyes lit up at once, his broad smile revealing a row of slightly uneven teeth. “Ah! Magnifico!” he exclaimed, clapping his hands together. “You shall see, signore. I will have my kitchen prepare the finest selection!”

With a cheerful nod, he disappeared swiftly into the kitchen, his heavy frame moving with surprising agility. A dark-haired young waiter, alert and quick, soon appeared, bearing the first courses with practiced ease. One by one, they were served a succession of delicate Italian appetizers — marinated vegetables, thinly sliced meats, fragrant breads.

Soon after came plates of hot dishes, steam rising from rich sauces, each bite promising both comfort and refinement. The waiter moved silently between kitchen and table, attentive but unobtrusive, ensuring their plates were replenished and their glasses kept full. Finally, small, elegant desserts were brought forth, each a perfect, sweet punctuation to the meal, leaving Elena and Yarovet equally impressed by the care and skill behind every offering.

Throughout, Yarovet observed Elena with a quiet, appreciative glance, noting the way her eyes brightened at each new dish, the soft pleasure of discovery mirrored in her gentle smiles. He took a delicate slice of marinated zucchini from the appetizer plate, its subtle tang awakening his palate, and glanced at Elena with quiet interest. “Tell me,” he began, his tone easy, almost conversational, “how it came to pass that you arrived in Rostov? I imagine every journey has its story.”

Elena smiled faintly, tucking a stray lock of hair behind her ear, her gaze drifting to the sunlit street outside for a moment. “It is not particularly grand,” she admitted, a faint laugh in her voice. “I came... well, to seek work, mostly. Opportunities in my own town were scarce, and a friend suggested Rostov. I arrived with little more than a trunk and my curiosity. The rest... well, the rest has been learning to find one’s place, day by day.”

“And have you?” Yarovet asked, raising an eyebrow, still delicately tasting a slice of soft, fragrant bread topped with a thin smear of olive paste.

“I believe so,” she said thoughtfully, her fingers tracing absent-minded circles along the rim of her glass. “It has been easier, perhaps, because one must adapt. And because... I met people who made the city seem less intimidating. People like you,” she added, a small blush rising to her cheeks.

“And how,” Yarosvet asked, leaning slightly forward as he broke off a thin slice of soft bread topped with a delicate smear of olive paste, “did they allow you to leave — alone, in a city not your own?”

He thought briefly of Zlata and the difficulties she had faced when venturing out, recalling his conversation with Inga. It struck him that Elena’s departure must have been equally fraught.

Elena’s expression darkened slightly, a shadow passing over her features. “My father... he died nearly two years back,” she began softly. “And my mother... she married again only a few months ago. But my stepfather — he has... improper inclinations toward me. Mother, fearing to lose even this husband, did not intervene. I could not remain there, enduring his attentions. So I decided to leave, to live my own life, and — perhaps selfishly — to avoid further scandal.”

Yarosvet reclined just a bit, easing into the moment, and asked gently, “How, then, did you manage to settle here, in Rostov?”

Elena’s gaze flickered briefly toward the street outside before returning to him. “I have an aunt here,” she began, “with whom I have stayed — temporarily, of course. She has a strong character, and... well, she has her own opinions about propriety. I fear she believes me nearly incorrigible, especially since someone — God knows who — whispered in her ear that her niece parades her bare backside before an artist.”

Yarosvet leaned slightly closer, a trace of a smile on his lips. “I heard, this morning by the embankment, that you had been modelling — nude — for some artist.”

Elena’s brow lifted. “And who told you that?” she asked, curiosity mingled with a faint wariness.

“Two rather tipsy gentlemen,” he replied lightly, “who seemed... more interested in gossip than in the truth.”

A shadow of a smile passed over her lips, tinged with resignation. “Ah,” she said quietly, “yes, some such types visited me yesterday. One does not always get to choose one’s audience. I must make do with what comes. Freedom requires a means, and I try to earn it as best I can.”

She shook her head with a faint laugh, a touch bitter. “As for the artist — he proved miserly beyond words.”

Yarosvet regarded her with measured curiosity. “And how,” he asked, “did you conceive this... rather daring, and certainly precarious, method of earning?”

A faint, reflective smile ghosted across Elena’s lips. “The artist, though miserly, had a fondness for all manner of risqué literature — particularly French,” she explained. “One afternoon, during a pause between sessions, I read about how in Paris some ladies hosted similar private salons. The idea... well, it lodged in my mind.”

She glanced briefly toward the street outside. “My aunt lives nearby, and I became acquainted with a local janitor. He allows me into an empty room, which I have arranged with screens, candles, and even an old gramophone. It is modest, yet it serves its purpose.”

Elena picked up a piece of marinated artichoke from the small plate before her, tasting it delicately, her eyes lifting to meet Yarosvet’s. “You know,” she murmured, a faint blush coloring her cheeks, “after your words, I feel... a little uneasy, truly.” She set the morsel down, fingers lingering on the edge of the plate. “Before, I never quite believed that anyone could actually harm me there. I mean... of course, I considered the possibility, but I trusted my own judgment — I choose my audience carefully, and I have a good eye for people, as I had for you. I felt safe in that knowledge.”

Her gaze softened, a shadow of vulnerability slipping into her features. “Now, though... after hearing you speak, I am less certain. It seems the world may be less predictable than I had thought.”

Yarosvet regarded her thoughtfully. “And tell me,” he asked, “how did you come by such a remarkable physique? Did you practise sports, ballet perhaps?”

Elena's eyes brightened with a spark of reminiscence. "Ah... it began long ago, in the little town where I grew up. Each winter, a circus troupe — shapito — would spend the season there. I was still very small then, and my father, who was alive at the time, introduced me to some of the performers he knew."

She smiled faintly, a trace of nostalgia in her voice. "I was captivated by the feats of the acrobats, and they began giving me lessons. I took to it quickly, and it became a passion. When they left for their tours, I kept practising on my own. I had even thought to join them, yet one harsh winter they never returned, and I was left to see them no more."

Yarosvet let his gaze linger for a moment, admiration clear in his tone. "Truly, your body... it is a rare harmony of strength and grace."

Elena's lips curved in a faint, modest smile. "Oh, that is hardly my achievement," she said softly. "It is nature's gift, I think. I merely try to preserve and maintain what I was given from birth."

Yarosvet's voice carried a quiet conviction. "Of course, you hardly need my compliments to know how striking you are. You must be well aware of your own allure — how could you not, having stood as a model or performed bare as an acrobat? And if freedom is truly what you seek, and money the key to it, then why not turn to the stage? The theatre, the circus — such places would surely welcome a figure like yours."

Elena gave a small laugh, though not without a serious undertone, and shook her head. "No, the stage is not for me. To stand beneath a director's gaze, to move when someone else commands, to repeat the same tricks each night until they no longer belong to you — what freedom is there in that? I have watched actresses, acrobats, dancers, all brilliant in their own way, yet bound tighter than any corset to the whims of others. Applause may be loud, but it is never truly theirs. It belongs to the crowd, to the managers, to the theatre that owns their very breath."

She lifted her glass, turning it slowly between her fingers, as if watching her thoughts reflected in the trembling wine. "I would rather risk uncertainty than trade my choices for chains disguised as ribbons. When I decide to perform, I choose the hour, the place, the eyes that may see me. It may earn me less, it may leave me alone at times, but at least each gesture, each glance, each daring step is mine alone. No one sets the curtain down but me."

Her gaze met his now, steady and unflinching, though a flicker of vulnerability crossed her face. "And besides... in a troupe I would be only one more silhouette, a moving limb lost in the pattern of many. Here, my body is my only stage. My voice, my skin, my smile — they are the instruments I command. With them I can speak more truthfully than I ever could beneath painted scenery. Perhaps it is folly, perhaps pride, but it feels closer to life. To my life."

A faint, defiant smile touched her lips. "Better to be alone with one's own fire than swallowed by the glare of borrowed torches."

Yarosvet let his fingers drum idly against the stem of his glass before he spoke. "And does it never trouble you — that the censors in Russia guard so jealously against the smallest hint of impropriety? They have made enemies of pens and brushes for far less than what you risk."

A wry, knowing smile played upon Elena's lips, a glint of shrewdness lighting her eyes. "It is precisely their zeal that makes such ventures worth the trouble," she said. "The moment something is forbidden, it becomes desirable — and desire, as I have discovered, pays well. The painter told me as much, though he paid little himself. If one avoids noise, keeps away from proclamations, and trusts instead in whispers passed from mouth to mouth... one may earn comfortably. And comfort is enough for me. I do not dream of estates or grand houses — I keep what I have, and that suffices. What matters is a steady circle of those who return."

His head dipped gently, as if acknowledging unspoken thoughts, his gaze weighing her words. "Then you seek to make your living by your nakedness."

She did not flinch; rather, she leaned back a little, meeting his eyes with frank composure. “And why not? Other labours may wait their time. For now, this — my youth, my body, the freedom of showing what I choose to show — this is my true capital. Later I may earn by different means, but for the present... yes. My bare skin is both my bread and my banner.”

Yarosvet regarded her steadily, his posture calm, composed, attentive. “Tell me,” he said, voice even, measured, “with that artist... did you ever sleep with him?”

Her lips lifted in the barest hint of a smile, her eyes briefly clouded with a passing memory. “No,” she said softly, almost regretfully. “He sometimes... let his hands wander, but never with the violence of my stepfather. Nothing more intimate than that.”

He met her gaze directly, letting the question linger. “And your spectators, those who came to watch... did you ever...?”

“No,” she answered promptly, her voice firm despite the faint blush rising to her cheeks. “Not one of them. I kept myself safe, always.”

He paused, weighing the silence, then asked quietly, “And if someone had offered... would you have?”

Her eyes flickered, a brief hesitation betraying the thought passing through her mind. “Someone did... just yesterday,” she admitted, “but I refused. I always refuse.” She drew a slow breath, meeting his eyes with sudden candor. “Except... perhaps for one person.”

Yarosvet let a brief pause settle between them, then shifted the conversation with careful precision, drawing her gaze to his. “Lena... when you consider yourself, what do you truly wish to be? How do you see yourself in the paths you are opening?”

Her eyes met his steadily, a subtle spark of thoughtfulness flickering there. “I wish to show women that they can inhabit themselves fully — without shame, without fear. To breathe, to move, to desire as they will, and to meet the world on their own terms.”

He observed her closely, noting the quiet force of her conviction, but now, guided by an undercurrent of practical curiosity, he added, “And... would you awaken them only in theory, or would you — if need be — walk beside them? Help them, in ways they cannot yet perceive for themselves?”

A faint, reflective smile curved her lips, and for the first time a glimmer of playful understanding danced in her eyes. “I would not lead them,” she said softly, “but I can reveal what is possible. Even in small gestures, even in a glance or a touch of encouragement, one can remind them of what they already are — and what they might dare to be.”

He let the words linger, sensing the subtle power in her modest phrasing. Here was someone who could stir courage and kindle desire, who might illuminate hidden strengths, adding a delicate counterpoint to Taissia’s mastery. Elena could awaken without pressing, provoke reflection without command, and inspire confidence through presence alone.

“And... you think you could do this for strangers as well as for yourself?” he asked lightly, probing the practical side of her potential.

“For strangers, yes,” she said, her voice steady, intimate, carrying the certainty of someone who understood both herself and others. “Yet each must find her own measure of freedom.”

He studied her thoughtfully, noting not only the spark of independence but a natural aptitude for those who would need such awakening. It struck him that her presence could complement Taissia’s influence: while Taissia drew women into trust, Elena could help them confront themselves, embrace themselves, and summon courage they had never dared to claim. A quiet understanding formed — here was someone whose self-possession and sensual awareness could ripple outward, shaping those around her with subtlety, without pressure, yet with undeniable authority.

Yarosvet let the pause hang for a measured instant, his fingertips idly circling the rim of the wineglass, though his gaze was steady upon her. The table between them still carried the warmth of

their meal — the lingering aroma of roasted meat and herbs, the subdued gleam of cutlery scattered like silver traces of a feast half-forgotten.

“You just said,” he remarked lightly, as though conjuring a memory in passing, “that you require but little in the way of money. The thought has stayed with me... for there are so few who claim such contentment.”

Elena looked at him with a sudden openness, her eyes bright, almost childlike in their directness. “Yes,” she nodded, smiling faintly. “I do not need very much. Enough to live without humiliation, to breathe easily. That is all.”

He let the question slip into the space between them with a trace of measured poise. His voice, however, carried the faint cadence of a challenge, wrapped carefully in courtesy.

“And yet you do not disdain a gift, nor the comfort of a gentleman’s generosity. Would you say then that money is nothing — or that it is something you allow yourself to welcome, when it comes with kindness?”

She laughed softly, a sound like glass touched by a finger. There was no trace of guile in it, only amusement at the paradox he had caught her in.

“Perhaps both. I will not pretend that I despise money. But I do not worship it either. I want enough to choose freely, not so much that I am chained to it. My last admirer — the painter — was talented, yes, but always counting coins, always withholding, as though generosity would drain his very soul. That I could not bear.”

Yarovet studied her with patient gravity, his eyes narrowing just slightly, though his tone remained gentle.

“So it is not the gold itself, but the spirit in which it is offered, that weighs in your heart?”

“Yes,” she answered without hesitation, leaning a little closer, her hands resting openly upon the table as though she had nothing to conceal. “If a man gives, not to flaunt or bind, but simply because it pleases him to give — then that is beautiful. Ten rubles may be much to one, little to another, yet what matters is the ease of the gesture. The painter gave with reluctance, always reminding me of what it cost him. You, when you give, you do not seem diminished by it.”

For a fleeting instant, he felt the stir of satisfaction — her words had the ring of sincerity, perhaps too unstudied to be feigned. And yet, with that very candour, she had revealed how keenly she measured generosity, how deeply she equated it with the man himself.

He let his smile broaden by the slightest degree, disguising his inward scrutiny as mere politeness.

“Then you judge not by the purse, but by the manner of the hand that opens it?”

She met his gaze firmly, without pretence, her voice almost tender in its conviction.

“Exactly. I would not follow a miser, no matter how brilliant. Nor would I flatter a rich man who throws gold like crumbs to birds. But kindness that gives without counting — that, I confess, I cannot help but trust.”

The words lingered between them like a fragrance, delicate yet unmistakable. Yarovet leaned back at last, folding the thought away, his expression calm. She had passed the small test, or so it seemed; her directness disarmed, her simplicity rang truer than elaborate protestations could ever have done. Yet beneath his composure he stored the knowledge carefully — here was a woman who saw wealth not as treasure, but as a measure of a man’s spirit, and in that measure she had found him to her liking.

His eyes followed the graceful line of her shoulders, the way the sunlight caressed each strand of hair, and in that stillness, a wordless understanding passed between them. Then, with a subtle pivot of his attention, he returned to the delicate thread she had left dangling. “Earlier,” he said softly, almost as if testing the waters, “you spoke of one exception. Tell me, Lena — whom did you mean?”

Her lips trembled, parting in a whisper before pressing together, as though the confession resisted its own utterance. A faint flush warmed her cheeks, yet her eyes remained fixed upon his,

steady, unflinching in the midst of her sudden vulnerability. “You know,” she murmured, her voice hushed and tremulous, “I should not think it, much less speak it aloud... yet, I would be... utterly happy, if I could please... you.”

The barest hint of a smile touched his lips, tempered by the patience of his study, but his eyes remained unsoftened, quietly commanding. “Please me? Lena, you already have. That performance — your art — it was a pleasure in itself.”

Her breath caught, and a shiver passed through her. She shook her head ever so slightly, drawing in a careful, measured breath, as if to gather courage from the very air between them. “No... not like that,” she whispered, voice barely above the murmur of the room. “Since last week, I have thought of you. I have imagined you. At night, I touched myself, thinking... imagining how it might be, if you — ”

She faltered, the words dissolving in a tremor of shame and desire, leaving the silence thick and palpable. Yarosvet’s gaze remained fixed, deliberate yet gentle, as though he sought the truth more than the confession. And then, with a subtle, teasing edge in his tone, he asked, “And... what, pray tell, would such a vision cost me?”

The colour rose, blooming across her neck and cheeks; she lifted her hand, fluttering it in delicate protest, half-laughing, half-choked with embarrassment. “Money?” she murmured, almost incredulous at the thought. “No... not that. It is never that. Not with you. I would give myself freely, for however long you would have me. There is no price. Only... only that you are... not merely commanding, but unlike any man I have ever known.”

Her gaze held his, open and trusting, and in that moment, Yarosvet felt the quiet weight of her sincerity, the subtle intertwining of courage and innocence. She was offering herself in a way that was wholly her own, not with calculation, nor with expectation, but with the pure, daring desire to connect, to share something intimate without pretense or demand.

His gaze held hers steadily, unflinching, and he asked with quiet directness, “How many men have you... been with?”

Elena’s eyes met his without hesitation, the faintest trace of steel beneath the vulnerability. “None,” she said simply, then almost immediately corrected herself, a faint flush colouring her cheeks. “Not... not that I am unpractised. I know how to give pleasure. To a man... to you, if it were ever to come.”

Yarosvet, lifting a delicate forkful of marinated artichoke and thinly shaved prosciutto, chewed thoughtfully, his eyes never leaving hers. “And... how do you intend to give pleasure, Lena?” he asked casually, the simplicity of the question belying its intimacy.

Elena cast a quick glance around, ensuring the quiet clatter of the restaurant masked them, then leaned forward, her voice low and mischievous. “I have a notion,” she said, eyes glinting with defiance and amusement, “of how a girl might attend to a gentleman... and I’m no shrinking violet. I’d take your cock in my mouth proper, lips and tongue exploring, whilst my fingers cupped your balls — gentle, firm, coaxing. My pussy, wet and willing, would welcome you if you chose, and... if you fancied, my backside is no stranger to a bit of audacious indulgence, though one mustn’t be too hasty.”

A faint, impish smile played at her lips, a curl brushing his knuckles. “Call it cheek, or the ways of a bold Rostov girl... but I know my trade, sir. And I’d put it to full use for you alone, should you care to command it.”

Elena’s words, delivered with the fearless frankness of her youth, had barely left her lips when Yarosvet’s composure cracked. A sudden, uncontrollable laugh burst from him, rolling through the small restaurant like a bright, unexpected bell. Heads turned: a few diners paused mid-forkful, eyebrows arched in curiosity, while from behind the counter the rotund chef poked his head out, wiping flour from his hands, his eyes darting suspiciously.

Yarosvet doubled over in his chair, shoulders shaking, tears gathering in the corners of his eyes. He grabbed a napkin, dabbing quickly at the glistening streaks of mirth on his cheeks, yet the

laughter only surged anew, bubbling from deep within, entirely unrestrained. Elena watched him with a faint, triumphant smile, a trace of mischief dancing in her eyes, clearly pleased that her candour had provoked such a vivid, unexpected reaction.

Even as the restaurant returned slowly to its quiet murmur, the echoes of his laughter lingered, leaving a warmth and lightness in the air, a moment of irrepressible, human levity bridging the gap between audacious intimacy and shared amusement.

Yarosvet's laughter subsided into a quiet chuckle, the tremor of amusement still residing in his throat. He dabbed at his eyes once more, then placed the napkin neatly on the table, his gaze settling on Elena with a calm, measured gravity. "You know," he said slowly, voice tinged with fond recollection, "there is but one girl I know who could conjure so delightful a nightmare."

Elena's eyes lifted, steady and expectant, a faint, curious quirk at the corner of her lips. She waited, the subtle arch of her brow betraying the faintest spark of anticipation.

"She is my companion in my wanderings," he continued, the faint shadow of a smile tugging at his lips, "by the name of Taissia."

Elena's expression shifted, a mixture of mild suspicion and curiosity. "And... where is this companion?" she asked cautiously, her tone soft but pointed. "For I have seen you alone, at every turn, and I have yet to see her at your side."

Yarosvet's fingers brushed the napkin again, smoothing it as though to punctuate the gravity of his next words. "She is occupied," he said evenly, voice quiet yet commanding. "At this very moment, she, together with the future mother of my children, is bringing from a neighbouring stanitsa a true Don Cossack girl, who, should it be her will, will also conceive by me. And here I sit, alone, enjoying the company of another spirited companion."

Elena's eyes widened slightly, a flicker of confusion crossing her delicate features, as though her mind were racing to parse the weight of his words. For a heartbeat, her lips parted, betraying the faintest tremor of disbelief; the wineglass she held seemed to catch the light in a way that mirrored her sudden, fleeting disorientation. She leaned back slightly, fingers curling around the stem as she wrestled with the notion just unveiled — that she was not the sole occupant of his attentions, that the world he orchestrated was more intricate, more boldly audacious than she had yet imagined.

Then comprehension sparked behind her gaze, and a mischievous, almost triumphant glimmer danced in her eyes. She lowered her voice, barely above a whisper, yet threaded with the light, playful thrill of daring amusement, careful that none of the other diners would overhear: "I did say... I did say, didn't I, that you are surrounded by a veritable garden of women!"

"And you," he said quietly, with that calm precision he always wore, "would you wish to join them? To take your place within this circle?"

For an instant, Elena seemed caught between laughter and awe; her brows twitched as though still weighing whether he had spoken in earnest. Then her lips curved, slow and deliberate, and she leaned ever so slightly closer across the table, her voice slipping out in a hushed but steady murmur. "If you were to number me among them," she said, the words sharp with irony yet warm with a strange thrill, "you would bestow upon me the highest honour. To be counted as one of your muses — » here her eyes narrowed with playful defiance, " — I could almost covet such a fate."

Her tone was neither girlish nor meek; it carried the poise of someone who had grasped the audacity of his proposal and chosen to embrace it with a matching boldness. There was a flicker of mischief in her gaze, a deliberate testing of limits, as if she wished to see how far his composure might stretch before the mask of calm gave way.

"In that case," Yarosvet said evenly, folding the napkin upon his knee as if pronouncing nothing more consequential than a change of course, "you may, straight after our meal, collect your things and leave your aunt's house. You will move at once to the *Moskovskaya*."

Elena froze, the words striking her with such force that she almost forgot to breathe. “You... you are in earnest?” she asked, her voice scarcely more than a whisper, as though afraid her own ears had betrayed her.

He inclined his head, the calmness in his tone untouched. “Quite so. And the key to that studio of yours — you will return it to the jenitor. If you are to be one of my muses, you shall not set foot there again.”

She stared at him for a long second, lips parted, then closed them with a faint nod, as if swallowing both surprise and resolve in a single motion. Without another word, she lowered her gaze to her plate and resumed her meal, lifting morsels of veal in rich Marsala sauce that the Italian waiter had brought earlier, together with a side of buttered green beans and a slice of warm, fragrant bread. She ate quietly, almost mechanically, yet with an odd composure — as though her silence were not hesitation, but rather the measured acceptance of a command whose weight she had already begun to feel.

At last Elena set down her knife and fork, folding them neatly upon the rim of the plate. She lifted her gaze to him, her eyes now clear, steady, almost grave in their questioning. “And tell me,” she said softly, “in such a case — how am I to earn my living?”

Yarosvet leaned back, his hand resting with easy authority upon the tablecloth. His reply came smooth as though rehearsed in silence long before. “You will not work,” he said, his voice carrying the quiet weight of inevitability. “Your only tasks shall be to aid me in my labours, to befriend Taissia, to take your share of pleasure in it, and to lend your hand to those young women who cross our path and find themselves in need of us.”

His eyes lingered on her, unblinking, as if measuring not her doubts but the depth of her acceptance.

Elena did not smile; instead her gaze grew pensive, narrowing ever so slightly as she studied him. The playful spark that had flickered there moments before was now tempered by thought, almost by doubt. She drew her hands together in her lap, fingers interlacing with deliberate slowness, and when she finally spoke her tone was even, almost solemn.

“So then,” she said, measuring each word, “I am not to be a muse at all, but rather a kept woman. How spacious is this golden cage you propose? And will its bars be gilded with freedom, or with obedience?”

Her gaze did not waver; there was no petulance in it, only the sharp, inquisitive daring of a young woman who valued her liberty enough to weigh its price, even when tempted by the allure of his authority.

Yarosvet did not flinch. On the contrary, a quiet satisfaction softened his features, as though her challenge had been the very response he had anticipated. He set aside his glass, folded his hands upon the table, and regarded her with the calm steadiness of a man accustomed to being tested.

“The cage, if such you wish to call it,” he replied evenly, “has doors that stand open. You may step through them at any time, and no hand of mine will hold you back. Yet within it, Lena, you will find more breadth than in all the narrow freedoms you now claim — breadth for your spirit, for your pleasures, for the strength you have scarcely begun to use. My muses are not slaves — although Tassia prefers to play one. They are companions, allies, partners in a venture greater than any I might pursue alone.”

A faint shadow of amusement touched his lips. “But make no mistake — the world beyond that door is meaner, smaller, and far less forgiving. You would not be caged, but sheltered. The question is only whether you value the shelter enough to bear the name of my muse.”

Elena listened in stillness, and the steadiness of his reply, its unvarnished candour, caught her more sharply than any grand vow could have done. For the first time she felt no game, no hidden trap in his words; only a directness that laid bare both his authority and his strange generosity.

Her breath escaped in a faint sigh, almost a whisper. She drew her hand lightly across her brow, as though to clear it, then looked at him again with eyes softer than before. The guarded brightness, the defiant tilt of her chin, gave way to something quieter — an unfeigned recognition of the gravity of what he had just entrusted her with.

“You speak plainly,” she murmured, her voice low but steady, “and I... I cannot but value that. Few men would say such things without disguise. Perhaps it is not a cage after all, but a place you open, daring me to enter.”

There was no surrender in her tone yet, but the sharp edge of resistance had softened, replaced by a more delicate, almost reverent attention — like someone touching, for the first time, the hidden depth beneath the surface of another’s soul.

Yarosvet inclined his head, receiving her words as though they were a pledge. No trace of triumph crossed his face; instead, there was a calm, grave warmth, the quiet certainty of one who accepts what has already been decided.

“Then so it shall be,” he said, his voice low but carrying the finality of an oath. “From this day, you are counted among mine. Do not trouble yourself with doubt — you have spoken, and I have heard. That is enough.”

He lifted his glass once more, as if sealing the moment not with ceremony but with the ease of everyday life, and sipped slowly. The gesture bore no haste, no pressure, yet in it lay a subtle, irrevocable claim, as though by answering him she had already stepped across the unseen threshold he had set before her.

For Elena, the weight of those words settled not as a command but as a mantle, firm and undeniable. She felt it resting on her shoulders — strange, heavy, yet not without a thrill, as though she had been chosen for something far larger than her own imaginings.

She ate in silence for a few moments, then set down her knife and fork and met his gaze. “And... what was it in my performance that pleased you?” she asked quietly, her tone steady, seeking an honest answer rather than flattery.

Yarosvet’s eyes met hers steadily. “It is your skill — your knowledge of how to seduce a gaze, and precisely what to offer,” he said, his voice calm, deliberate. “You do not merely move or smile; your nudity is no simple exposure, but a finely honed instrument of allure, wielded with purpose, with touch, with subtle gesture. That is what drew me.” He allowed a faint smile to touch his lips, adding with a quiet, teasing gravity, “— and, of course, not discounting the lines of your long thighs, the shadows cast by the luxuriant hair upon your mound, the subtle play of muscles beneath the taut skin of your buttocks, or the audacious rise of your pointed nipples.”

“And I... I found myself — literally — in love with your hands,” Elena confessed, her voice low, trembling with candour, eyes fixed on his. “The way they traced me... over my nipples, my stomach, my buttocks, between my thighs... each touch spoke more than words ever could.”

Her fingers twined delicately about the edge of the table, yet her gaze remained unwavering — a mingling of boldness and gentle vulnerability, allowing him to perceive the weight and verity of her confession.

“Pray, tell me,” Yarosvet inquired in a voice that was quiet yet unwavering, his gaze fixed and resolute, “are you possessed by jealousy?”

Her fingers twined with idle grace about the rim of her glass, while her eyes remained contemplative, betraying a subtle mingling of thought and feeling. “I... I have not yet had the occasion to test that,” she admitted softly, a faint smile playing at her lips, “but I believe — no, not truly.”

Her eyes met his with a mixture of honesty and curiosity, the subtle candour in her tone giving him a glimpse of her unguarded self.

Yarosvet lifted his hands slowly, palms open, letting them catch the light. “And tell me,” he asked, his voice calm but edged with quiet curiosity, “what would you do, if I were to touch another with these hands, here, before you?”

Elena's gaze met his steadily, unflinching. "If it pleases you so, then... I would do nothing," she admitted softly, a faint trace of mischief in her eyes. "But if we speak of my freedom to choose, then I would employ every means within my power to make you wish to touch me as well."

He leaned slightly forward, voice measured, "And — leaving the other aside?"

Her lips curved in a subtle, knowing smile. "No, not necessarily," she said, her tone calm yet spirited. "But at the very least... in equal measure."

Yarosvet leaned back just so, a faint, approving smile playing upon his lips. His eyes lingered on her with measured satisfaction, taking note of the frankness and subtle cunning in her replies. Each word she uttered, each spark of daring tempered by composed self-possession, served to confirm his quiet appraisal: she was precisely as spirited and perceptive as he had long suspected.

Yarosvet's gaze shifted briefly, steady and practical. "And your papers?" he asked, voice calm, almost casual. "Are they all in order?"

Elena's fingers stilled on the table, and she met his eyes with a measured nod. "Yes," she replied softly, yet firmly. "Everything is as it should be."

Her tone carried no hesitation, yet the faint alertness in her expression suggested she understood the weight behind the question.

Elena delicately dabbed her lips with a fine napkin, murmuring a soft word of thanks. Though the hour permitted their departure, she yet desired to retreat briefly to the powder room. He granted her leave, and she hastened away. With a calm and measured air, he settled the bill. Soon thereafter, she returned, and once more, arm in arm, they stepped forth into the sunlit street, while the rotund chef still peered from behind his counter, a faint, bemused smile playing upon his visage.

He escorted her to her aunt's house, waiting patiently as she went inside to collect her belongings. There was little to gather — a single, small travelling bag. "On the way," she said, "we must stop by my studio; I left my acrobat's costume there." They returned to the archway, and she slipped inside, retrieving everything she required. Emerging, she made her way into the courtyard and handed the key to the janitor. Yarosvet noticed she also passed him some coins; it was hardly likely the janitor had lent her the room without expectation. Satisfied, she returned to Yarosvet, took his arm, and together they set off toward his... or rather their hotel.

As they reached the entrance, the porter lifted his cap, offering a brief nod of recognition to Yarosvet, and though his eyes flickered toward Elena, there was no hesitation, no question asked. A few other guests glanced curiously, their murmurs swallowed by the echo of polished floors and the clatter of a departing bellboy, yet none dared linger. Yarosvet's presence alone ensured passage; the hotel seemed to fold around him, deferential yet discreet. Elena, arm in his, felt the subtle heat of attention brushing past them — curiosity tempered by respect — while Yarosvet's gaze remained calm, measured, and entirely untroubled by the watching eyes.

They ascended the central staircase to the upper floor, the polished balusters catching the afternoon sun. At the landing, Yarosvet opened the door to his — their — suite and stepped aside, allowing Elena to enter first. The apartment was quiet, its drawing room and adjoining bedroom empty for the moment, yet brimming with the subtle promise of rearranged belongings and choices soon to be made.

Alone at last within the quiet expanse of the suite, Elena's delight could no longer be contained. She pressed herself against him, arms winding around his neck, and kissed him with sudden, passionate urgency. Yarosvet smiled, meeting her fervor with calm amusement, and guided her gently, helping her shed her coat, which she draped over the stand by the entrance. He hung his own over it as well, the simple gesture marking the beginning of their shared possession of the space.

He led her through the suite, showing the drawing room, the neat bathroom, and the adjoining bedroom. "I can have an extra bed brought," he remarked, his tone casual yet suggestive, "or you may share the space with us." Elena laughed, the sound light and teasing, shaking her head. "Oh, there's room here for not three, but all five of us," she replied, her eyes sparkling with glee at the thought.

He laughed softly, shaking his head. “Mind you don’t jinx us,” he said, his tone teasing yet measured, a faint smile playing about his lips. Then, in a single, fluid breath, he added, “And now... undress.”

She paused at the threshold, a swift glance confirming they were alone, and then began with deliberate grace. Fingers unfastened the dress at the back, the smooth silk sliding over her shoulders as she lifted it, letting the layers of petticoat and cotton follow in a gentle cascade. Each motion was measured, almost ritualistic, revealing the quiet curve of her waist and the shadowed swell of her hips, hinting at the form beneath without fully betraying it.

Her hands moved to the petticoat, lifting its voluminous folds and stepping lightly free, the airy fabric brushing against her legs like a whispered sigh. The corset followed — laces undone, the structured embrace of the garment released to reveal the supple line of her torso, the soft swell of her breasts partially veiled by the chemise, yet impossible to ignore. She tugged at the drawers, sliding them down over her hips, the movement precise, controlled, each gesture a subtle promise.

At last, she stood before him, clothed in nothing but the small, delicately embroidered boots that still embraced her feet. The rest of her attire lay forgotten, cast aside like a whispered secret, leaving her bare skin to glow softly in the gentle light that filled the room. She lingered there with a quiet courage, a living paradox — modesty entwined with boldness, innocence tinged with a silent invitation. Tilting her head ever so slightly, a playful smile curved her lips as she asked, “Shall I take these off too?”

He said nothing. His silence was heavy, not with apathy but with rapt attention, his gaze roaming slowly over her form, drinking in the beguiling harmony of vulnerability and defiance, crowned only by those tenacious little boots.

“Later,” he murmured at last, a faint smile brushing his lips as he caught her hand in his. Without waiting for her reply, he guided her toward the tall glass doors and pushed them open onto the balcony.

The first touch of the air made her flinch — a little shiver coursed across her bare skin, the coolness biting after the warmth of the room. Her eyes darted nervously to the darkened windows opposite, as if they might conceal a watcher. But as she stepped out beside him, the hush of the courtyard below, the shadows of the eaves, and the unseasonable hour all reassured her. There were no prying eyes. Only the pale daylight lay upon her shoulders, while a passing breeze touched her skin — at first startlingly cool, then softening into something nearer a caress.

Her hesitation melted; she straightened, half-defiant, half-trusting, her chest rising with a breath that seemed at once nervous and proud.

Yarosvet did not speak. He let his silence weigh upon her like a caress more eloquent than words, his gaze travelling openly, almost languidly, over the length of her figure: from the firmness of her calves, still bound in the snug little boots, up the lithe lines of her thighs, the tender hollow of her waist, to the soft lift of her breasts where the sunlight kindled an impudent glow. Her hair shimmered like a flame trapped in silk, alive with the day’s warmth.

At last he stepped closer. He raised her hand to his lips, kissing her knuckles slowly, then turned her palm and pressed his mouth into its centre with a tenderness that belied the hunger in his eyes. His free hand slid to her hip, drawing her infinitesimally nearer, until her shoulder brushed against his chest.

“You,” he murmured, almost to himself, “were meant to be seen in the open air.” His fingers wandered upward, tracing the curve of her side, savouring her tremor as much as the glow of her bare skin beneath his touch.

She pressed her little derrière to the balcony railing, facing Yarosvet, feeling the cold stone floor beneath her boots. Slightly arched, she raised her arms above her head, tilting her chin upward and closing her eyes, surrendering entirely to the moment. His gaze roamed over the curves of her body: from the gentle line of her neck to her delicate shoulders, along the swell of her breasts, which

he observed as if memorising every contour, then downward to her flat stomach, rounded hips, and the subtle flush of her intimate flesh, where the soft light traced a suggestive pattern on her skin.

Yarosvet stepped closer, moving with an almost instinctive attentiveness, attuned to her reactions, careful not to disturb her breath or the tension in her posture. His fingers first traced along the inner sides of her arms, then softly touched her breasts, feeling their firmness, warmth, and subtle quiver. His hand glided over her stomach, sensing each muscle, each curve, deliberate and reverent, like an artist studying the form of a living sculpture. His lips brushed against her collarbone, leaving a light imprint, then descended to her abdomen, pausing at the gentle hollow beneath her breasts, before returning to kiss her nipples, which trembled under his touch.

Her breathing deepened, grew audible, her skin warming, yet she did not recoil; on the contrary, she arched slightly, inviting him to explore further, allowing his fingers to skim the inner thighs, touch the front of her buttocks where the subtle play of muscle created a tantalising relief. Each movement of his hands was intuitive, attentive, tender, yet imbued with an authority she surrendered to without resistance.

He leaned down, lips pressing against her stomach and the tops of her thighs, feeling the heat of her skin, leaving delicate kisses that traced from abdomen to upper thighs, along the line of her pubic hair, his tongue brushing lightly over the soft tufts. She stifled small gasps, arms still above her head, spine straight, chest thrust forward, offering him every curve to admire.

Yarosvet's fingers traced the inner thighs, then touched her intimate flesh with cautious eagerness and quiet resolve, sensing her readiness and the subtle tremor beneath his hands. She leaned slightly toward him, pressing her chest to his, allowing him to feel the warmth of her body, yet stood erect, maintaining grace and command over herself. His hands, lips, and breath created an invisible web in which she dissolved, relishing each instant, each sensation, while remaining the center of her own desire, the author of her choice.

The cold stone under her boots sharpened the sensations, every contact heightened, as he explored the contours of her waist and hips, while she leaned toward him, offering kisses he received with quiet, almost reverent delight. Everything unfolded slowly, with attentive, responsive care for every point of contact, every quiver of her body, saturating the space between them with desire, yet threaded with respect, awe, and an appreciation for her daring and trust.

She remained pressed against the balcony railing, her small boots grounding her on the stone floor, as if rooting her to the moment, yet every inch of her upper body leaned into him, offering herself. Yarosvet's eyes traced the elegant curve of her throat down to the swell of her breasts, pausing at the soft rise and fall beneath his gaze. With a quiet, almost reverential patience, he lowered his lips to her chest, placing delicate kisses over the peaks he had admired, letting his hands rest lightly at first, brushing the sides of her torso, feeling the warmth and subtle shiver of her muscles under his touch.

She inhaled sharply, tilting her head, her hands momentarily catching in her hair as a sigh slipped past her lips. His fingers glided lower, tracing the soft planes of her abdomen, and then, with gentle care, he ventured closer to her most intimate flesh. Each touch was slow, deliberate without stiffness, teasing without intrusion, eliciting soft moans she tried to stifle, yet which betrayed the heat building between them.

Her thighs pressed slightly toward him as his fingers traced the inner curves, gliding over the warmth there, while his lips followed a path along the hollow beneath her navel, brushing the sensitive skin at the junction of thigh and hip. She arched subtly, chest forward, spine elongating, allowing the soft contact to awaken every nerve, every tremor of sensation, without yielding control.

Yarosvet leaned in further, lips pressing gentle, searching kisses against the tender flesh, and with one hand he cradled her hip, guiding without force, while the other ventured along the delicate ridges of her lower abdomen, brushing the soft hair that marked her femininity. She shivered, breath quickening, and pressed herself slightly against him, hands releasing her braid to rest lightly on his shoulders, anchoring herself yet inviting him deeper into the shared rhythm of their desire.

His lips finally hovered over the apex of her intimacy, warm and wet, teasing the edges, tasting, sensing the subtle tension and wetness she offered. Each kiss, each touch was slow, a study in contrasts: tender and urgent, reverent and exploratory, drawing out small whimpers and gasps that trembled against the stone balcony. Her body, poised and upright, seemed almost sculptural, yet alive with trembling heat, every curve and hollow a testament to both her daring and the surrender she granted.

Her breathing quickened as his fingers and lips danced along the delicate ridges, discovering the subtle tension and heat that she had barely noticed until now. He pressed small, feather-light kisses against the softest areas, letting them linger just long enough to draw out her responses — a trembling sigh, a faint arch of her back, the gentle clench of her thighs. Each motion was deliberate but fluid, a continuous dialogue without words, a conversation written in the trembling of muscles and the rise and fall of her chest.

She tilted her head, exposing her throat, and let her hands rest against his shoulders, fingers gripping softly as if to anchor herself. The warmth of his touch traveled upward, caressing the lower belly, the soft swell of the mons, the subtle shadows of hair there. Her skin responded with a delicate flush, the small shiver that ran through her emphasizing the intensity of sensation, even as she remained upright, balanced against the cool stone under her boots.

Yarovet's lips followed the contours with patience, exploring without haste, tasting the subtle shifts of her body's desire. His fingers, pressing lightly, traced the gentle curves, nudging the tender flesh with respectful insistence, coaxing a rhythm from her tremors and sighs. Each sigh, each quiet moan, each shiver became a part of the intricate ballet of their intimacy, a soundscape woven into the warmth of the afternoon, the stone beneath her boots grounding her in the physical world even as her mind spun in pleasure.

Her eyes closed fully, eyelashes brushing the cheeks, lips parting as the sensations deepened. Hands slipped slightly along his shoulders, seeking the warmth and firmness beneath, pressing, releasing, pressing again. She arched subtly at the precise moments his lips brushed, his fingers followed, learning the contours of her response, drawing subtle sounds of delight from her throat without rushing, without pushing, but with a firm, appreciative presence.

The sunlight filtering across the balcony glinted off her boots, the faint shimmer of her skin catching the light in sharp contrast, each small movement of muscle under his touch becoming a quiet declaration of her surrender and her agency at once. Her chest rose and fell, her thighs shifted slightly, offering a new angle, a new sensation, and he adapted, always following her body's whispers, her soft, stifled breaths, her small shifts, creating a dance of closeness, trust, and shared heat that left the world outside the balcony irrelevant.

She tilted her hips gently, allowing him access to the curve and tension of her lower belly, the soft warmth that awaited his lips and hands, and every contact drew a new, soft gasp from her. His movements remained tender yet attentive, coaxing her responses, teasing her without impatience, turning each small sound and shiver into a dialogue that neither words nor restraint could contain. The cool stone beneath her boots contrasted with the heat building in her core, sharpening every touch, every kiss, every brush of his fingers along her yielding skin.

She yielded to his gentle insistence, letting him guide her around so that her back pressed against the warmth of his chest, the curve of her spine barely brushing his torso. Her fingers gripped the smooth railing of the balcony, knuckles whitening, while her boots planted firmly on the stone floor, legs parting with a subtle, instinctive arch. The motion was at once vulnerable and deliberate, a contrast that made every line of her body seem poised on the knife-edge between surrender and command.

Yarovet's hand found the small, firm swell of her buttocks, his palm cupping and kneading with an intimacy that drew soft gasps from her parted lips. He traced the subtle lines of tension and shadow between them, following the deep groove that marked the curve of her flesh. Each touch was

careful, exploratory, attuned to the quiver and shiver that ran along her spine, translating her bodily language into a silent conversation of heat and anticipation.

With deliberate gentleness, he guided a finger, then his thumb, along the tender crease between her small, rounded cheeks, savoring the responsive tremor that passed through her body. Her hips tilted slightly, yielding to the touch, while her hands clutched at the railing as if to anchor herself to the solidity of the balcony, the stone floor cold beneath her boots grounding the heated intimacy of the moment.

He lingered there, studying the faint flush, the quickened breaths, the subtle clench of muscles that marked her awareness and consent. Then, with the softest pressure, he pressed forward, the tip of his finger gliding along the delicate folds of her femininity. She inhaled sharply, a fine, stifled sound that betrayed both surprise and eager acceptance, the small arch of her back pushing into his hand as if guiding him deeper, inviting yet restraining in perfect harmony.

Then, with a careful, reverent motion, Yarosvet eased the breadth of his thumb into her most secret hollow, the warm, tight resistance embracing him with a trembling insistence. She gasped, the sound vibrating through the quiet air of the balcony, a mixture of surprise, anticipation, and the exquisite sharpness of pleasure that caught her unawares. His hand held her firmly yet delicately, the pressure and depth attuned to the subtle contractions and releases of her inner muscles, exploring the narrow, yielding confines with the precision of one who reads every signal, every shiver, every whispered quiver of consent.

Her knees shifted slightly, adjusting to the stone beneath her boots, the cool hardness contrasting with the heat pressing into her from his touch. The small arch of her back deepened, her torso swaying imperceptibly as she instinctively guided him further, lips parting in a soft exhale that mingled with the faint rustle of her movement against the railing. Each subtle tightening of her walls drew a responsive, measured pulse from him, a dialogue of flesh and intention that required neither words nor glance.

He remained there, pressing gently, exploring the contours of her femininity from within, feeling the tension and relaxation, the delicate yielding of her narrowness that wrapped around him like velvet. Every movement was both probing and tender, a careful navigation of the boundaries between restraint and abandon. Her breath came faster, cheeks flushing, eyelashes lowered, as if the sensation rendered her both exposed and sovereign, fully aware of her power even in the surrender.

Tiny tremors ran through her body with each subtle adjustment, a wave of sensation that travelled from the base of her spine through thighs and hips, echoing in the core of her being. He stayed attuned, letting her reactions shape the rhythm and depth of his exploration, savoring the exquisite combination of narrowness and warmth that welcomed him, the responsive yielding that made each pulse, each quiver, a language unto itself.

Time seemed suspended; the world beyond the balcony, the distant hum of life below, faded completely, leaving only the resonance of breath, touch, and the intimate communion of their bodies. Her small, deliberate movements guided him, while he reciprocated with the utmost patience, pressing, exploring, lingering within her, turning every responsive shiver into a subtle, shared cadence of sensation, a private symphony of their corporeal dialogue.

He traced gentle kisses along her shoulder blades, descending the line of her spine to the small of her back, finally brushing over the curve of her buttocks. Her hands gripped the balcony rail, fingers tightening with each caress, legs slightly parted, grounding her against the stone floor. She exhaled softly, a breathy whisper escaping between parted lips: "I love you," the words carrying both surrender and fervent delight.

Suddenly, he withdrew, his finger slipping free from her intimate folds. She blinked in surprise, twisting slightly to glance over her shoulder, but he motioned for her to remain perfectly still. Obedient, she stayed rooted in place, naked save for her boots, eyes lowered toward the small

garden beneath the balcony, anticipation and tension tightening every line of her body as she waited for his next move.

Yarosvet returned from the room with a riding crop in hand, its leather handle shining faintly in the sunlight. He held it out to her, an unspoken invitation, and Elena met it willingly. She parted her lips and ran her tongue along the taut leather, savoring its firmness, its texture. A shiver ran through her, not of cold but of anticipation, of that delicate tension that comes from complete understanding and trust.

With deliberate care, he guided the handle of the riding crop inside her, and she responded instinctively, muscles tightening around it with precise control. The leather, warm and taut, slid within her not as a threat but as a thrilling, intimate extension of herself, a strange, sensuous echo of her own body, aligning with the elegant line of her legs like the sweep of a scythe she might wield.

“Hold it,” Yarosvet murmured, his voice low, measured, a caress that traveled down her spine. And she did, every muscle tightening, every nerve alert, the sensation an exquisite blend of restraint and surrender. The sunlight, warm on her back, the subtle sway of the balcony beneath her, the gentle rustle of the city below — they all converged into a single, immersive moment. Elena’s body became a living instrument, each subtle shift, each tiny flex, in perfect rhythm with his presence behind her.

The afternoon light painted their forms in gold and shadow, every line and curve accentuated, every sensation heightened. The crop, held firm and yet soft in its weight, became a part of her own body, a sharp, elegant counterpoint to the natural flow of her form, and she felt a surge of awareness and power, strange yet entirely her own.

He stepped close to her, the warmth of his presence brushing against her back. They leaned together over the railing, gazes dropping to the small garden below, the sunlight scattering across its neatly trimmed hedges and winding paths. For a moment, the world seemed suspended — just the two of them, the day’s golden light, and the subtle rhythm of her breath as she held the riding crop within her.

Then his attention returned to her fully, tender and unwavering. He watched the delicate tension in her body, the way she struggled slightly to maintain the position, the muscles of her thighs and abdomen tightening around the foreign weight she had willingly taken. With gentle, reverent hands, he gathered her braid and laid it along the hollow of her spine. His fingers smoothed it against her skin, tracing its line with a quiet affection.

“You see,” he murmured, voice low and intimate, “your braid and the crop... they are sisters, two tails of the same body.” He let the words linger, and she shivered — not from cold, but from the awareness of the strange, exquisite harmony he described, the intertwining of her own form with the object, a living echo of herself in the warmth of daylight.

He left her again, stepping back into the room, the balcony door left ajar, sunlight spilling through the gap and falling in a warm slant across the floor. She remained at the railing, muscles still coiled around the handle of the riding crop she held within her. A few moments passed before his voice, low and commanding yet tender, called her.

She turned, meeting his gaze, and the message was clear — come. Every step toward him required care, a slow, deliberate motion to ensure the crop did not slip from her grasp, to maintain the exquisite balance of control and surrender. The tail of the riding crop trailed across the floor behind her, a sleek, leather ribbon marking her path, moving almost like a shadow of her own body.

With each measured step, she felt the strain and the thrill, the strange, intimate weight pressing within her, and the unspoken connection between them deepened. The sunlight warmed her back, the smoothness of the floor under her boots, the faint sound of the leather sliding against her body — all became part of the moment, a quiet symphony of sensation and awareness.

She approached the chair with measured care, the handle anchored within her, the leather tail of the crop trailing noiselessly over the polished floorboards, a dark ribbon that marked every hesitant step. When she stopped before him, sunlight framed her figure, pouring through the half-open door

and gilding the soft sheen of her skin. Slowly, deliberately, she spread her legs and laced her hands once more behind her head, her posture both daring and submissive, as if offering herself to his gaze and touch.

Yarovet extended his hand without hurry, his fingers slipping between her thighs to close firmly around the protruding handle. The intimacy of that gesture, so precise and leisurely, drew from her a tremor that passed visibly through her body. With quiet control, he began to move it — upwards, then down again — measured strokes that made her thighs tighten, her breath falter, her chest lift in silent entreaty.

Her eyes fluttered shut, her lips parted in a hushed exhalation. The world beyond the room vanished; there was only his hand, his calm, deliberate rhythm, and the strange, exquisite fullness that possessed her with every motion. “Do not stop,” she whispered, her voice trembling, heavy with the urgency of her need. The words fell into the sunlit hush like a vow, carrying both surrender and command, as though her entire being had been reduced to this singular plea, this desperate craving for continuity of his touch.

Instead of yielding, Yarovet’s hand grew suddenly still, the handle caught motionless within her, his gaze fixed and unwavering. The abrupt cessation made her tremble, her breath catch in her throat. For a moment she stood suspended, the silence as heavy as her own need.

Then, with a sudden resolve born of impatience and desire, she moved herself. Slowly, she began to lower and rise again, her body taking command of the rhythm he had denied. The handle slid within her in deep, unhurried strokes, and every motion drew a new, quivering sigh from her lips.

He reclined in the chair, his eyes devouring her every movement — the graceful bending of her spread knees, the taut play of muscles along her calves, the supple tightening of her thighs as they strained and flexed. Sunlight poured over her form, outlining each contour, gilding the strength in her legs and the delicate tension of her posture.

The sight entranced him: her body working against itself, balancing pain with pleasure, restraint with abandon. Her braid slipped forward, brushing her shoulder as if to echo the leather trailing behind her, two shadows of the same desire. In that moment she seemed at once fragile and indomitable, a creature of instinct and will, sculpted by the raw light of day into something both human and unearthly.

Her body moved with increasing urgency, each descent carrying her deeper, each ascent drawing her higher into a trembling arc of sensation. Yarovet’s eyes lingered not on her face but on the shifting landscape of her form — the taut belly that quivered with strain, the delicate hollow beneath her ribs that pulsed with every breath, the sudden contraction of muscles hidden beneath smooth skin.

Her thighs, parted wide, revealed the powerful grace of motion: not frantic, but deliberate, measured by a rhythm that was her own. He watched the way her calves lengthened as she lifted, the curve of her instep within the boot as it braced against the floor, the sinews of her legs working with a silent determination. Each adjustment of her stance carried its own language, unspoken yet eloquent in its honesty.

The leather handle gleamed where sunlight struck it, disappearing and reappearing with every motion, a visible testament to her resolve. The tail of the crop dragged idly across the floorboards, tracing errant lines like the stroke of a pen recording her struggle. Above, her braid swayed against her back, a dark pendulum keeping time with her rising and falling.

From his seat he studied her with the patience of a naturalist watching some rare, untamed creature. The posture she assumed — legs bowed, arms raised, torso drawn taut — reminded him faintly of a harvest maiden bending to cut sheaves, her body at once labouring and radiant beneath the merciless sun. There was nothing theatrical in her movements, only a raw sincerity, a surrender to necessity that turned her into a vision both sensual and solemn.

Her rhythm grew sharper, no longer the cautious sway of obedience but the fierce insistence of hunger. Each downward plunge drew from her a stifled groan, her lips parted, her head thrown back so the braid brushed against her shoulder blades. The handle, once heavy and alien, now seemed fused with her body, a core around which she revolved, a burden transformed into necessity.

Her knees bent deeply, straining wide, and the play of her muscles grew almost violent in its clarity — the swelling curve of her thighs hardening, the long lines of her calves shuddering with effort, her boots gripping the floor as though to anchor her against collapse. Veins rose faintly beneath the surface of her skin, pulsing with the exertion, and her abdomen tightened with every rise, quivering with each desperate descent.

Still he sat immobile, silent, his eyes fixed on her with the serenity of a man drinking in a rare spectacle. The sunlight shifted across the room, laying gold over her breastbone, sliding in stripes across her stomach and thighs, painting her labour with the solemnity of a ritual.

The leather tail behind her no longer trailed idly; it writhed and jerked with her movements, snaking across the boards in sudden arcs, a mute testimony to her urgency. She rode herself with a single purpose, driven not by command but by a devouring necessity, as though her very being demanded completion.

Her whisper came again, fractured by breath, but this time she did not beg — she urged herself onward, her voice ragged with the naked force of desire. The balcony door, still ajar, let in the hum of the day, the faint rustle of the garden below, yet these sounds were swallowed by the rhythm of her body: flesh striking, leather shifting, boots scraping softly upon the wood.

And still he watched, letting her wrestle with the unyielding length and firmness of the crop, as though testing how far her own will could carry her when left utterly alone with her need.

At that instant the quiet was broken by the sharp metallic click of the lock. The door swung inward, and into the sunlit room stepped Taissia, her eyes bright with curiosity, her mouth curved in a mischievous half-smile as though she had walked in upon a secret she had long suspected. The warm draught from the corridor stirred the trailing leather on the floor, lifting it for a moment like a serpent startled from slumber.

Elena froze in her labour, breath caught in her throat, arms still raised, knees bent wide, the braid brushing her back while the handle remained buried within her. Her face flushed crimson, not only with effort but with the sudden sting of discovery. For a suspended heartbeat she seemed carved in stone — poised, trembling, every muscle holding the impossible tension of shame and rapture.

Yarosvet did not move. Seated in his chair, calm and composed, he merely turned his gaze toward Taissia, as though her entrance were not intrusion but inevitability. The girl's glance travelled quickly from him to the scene before her: Elena's parted stance, the dark ribbon of leather stretched across the floor, the subtle trembling of her thighs. And instead of recoiling, Taissia's smile deepened, her head tilting with a feline curiosity, as though she had stepped into a tableau prepared in her honour.

Without loosening his grip on the handle, without granting Elena the mercy of release, Yarosvet turned his head toward the intruder, his voice calm, almost conversational, as though nothing unusual were unfolding before him.

"How was your journey?" he asked, his hand steady between Elena's thighs, keeping her impaled upon the rigid length so that she dared not shift, dared not betray herself with a faltering movement.

Taissia's eyes sparkled with a quick, sly amusement. She let the door fall shut behind her with a soft thud and answered lightly, as though reporting on a mundane errand.

"Quite well," she said, tugging the buttons of her coat open. "Zlata is settling now at Inga's house. And Inga herself sends you her greetings."

Her tone carried a teasing lilt, as though the message contained more than words, and with a careless elegance she slid the coat from her shoulders. She hung it upon the stand by the door. She moved with intentional grace, at a calm and steady pace, as if performing a sacred rite. Then, without

the slightest hesitation, she crossed the room toward him, boots clicking softly against the polished boards, her eyes never straying from the tableau of Elena trembling in her strained posture before the chair.

The sunlight caught Taissia as she approached, gilding the fine lines of her face, the dark ribbon of her mahogany collar at her throat, the mischievous set of her mouth. Her presence altered the air of the room at once: no longer was it a secret struggle between two, but a charged triangle, the silence thick with expectation and unspoken daring.

Taissia lowered herself with feline ease onto the armrest of his chair, one leg swinging lightly, the other drawn close, her body leaning just enough to brush his shoulder. She did not speak at once; her eyes roved silently over Elena's figure, fixed in that strained, unrelenting posture. The raised arms, the parted knees, the long braid slipping forward, dangling heavily between her breasts, the coarse strands grazing the stiffened buds of her nipples as if mocking their helplessness — all seemed to hold her gaze with idle, almost cruel curiosity.

At last she tilted her head, her voice breaking the silence with deliberate calm.

“And who is this?”

Yarovet did not answer her directly. His hand remained firm, still keeping the handle in its place, a reminder of his command. His eyes shifted to Elena, and his tone carried the weight of quiet authority.

“Tell her who you are.”

Elena drew in a trembling breath. Her body was aflame with effort, every muscle straining to keep her balance, yet she did not falter in her stance. With eyes closed for a heartbeat, she gathered herself, then spoke, her voice unsteady but clear enough to carry.

“My name is Lena,” she whispered, lips dry. “And I... I belong to him now. I am his — at his will, at his mercy.”

The words seemed to cost her something, and yet when they left her mouth, her face flushed with a strange, secret pride, as though naming her subjugation out loud gave it a sharp and undeniable truth.

Taissia's eyes narrowed slightly, a sly spark glinting within them. She let her lips curve into the faintest smile, leaning a little closer to Yarovet, her gaze never leaving the trembling figure before them.

Yarovet's palm lingered with quiet weight on Taissia's thigh, his tone measured, almost casual. “Your sister in misfortune,” he remarked, the words falling with deliberate gravity, as if naming her bound Elena more firmly than the leather crop itself. Then, turning his gaze back to the girl before him, he let the faintest smile crease his lips. “Do not falter. Go on.”

At once she obeyed. Her lashes trembled, then sank shut, and her face took on the taut rapture of someone surrendering to an inexorable demand. The braid, now hanging pendulous between her breasts; each sway brushed the hardened points of her nipples, teasing them as she pressed herself downward upon the unyielding shaft. Her knees bent with renewed strain, her thighs quivered, her calves grew taut as cords — all her body seemed to coil around that leather length, welcoming and resisting in one fevered motion. A muted gasp fled her lips, not quite a cry, as though she feared that breaking silence would break the spell he had cast over her.

And all the while Yarovet watched, his fingers never loosening from the crop's handle, forcing her to work against its immovable hardness, while Taissia, perched gracefully at his side, absorbed every tremor and curve of her new sister's naked struggle with a gaze that was both curious and mercilessly amused.

Taissia's eyes danced along the trembling lines of Lena's body, the braid dangling provocatively between her breasts, the subtle shiver of every strained muscle laid bare under the afternoon light. A soft, almost purring chuckle escaped her lips. “Well, well... someone seems to have found her rhythm,” she said, voice light, teasing, carrying that familiar edge of mischief.

Her gaze flicked up to Yarosvet for a fraction of a second, as though seeking permission or gauging his amusement, then returned to Elena. “Do you always obey so... diligently?” Taissia asked, tilting her head, one booted foot tapping lightly against the floor. There was no malice, only the sharp curiosity of someone delighting in the delicate balance of control and surrender before her.

Elena’s body, still coiled around the rigid crop, shuddered with every movement, and she dared not speak. Her only answer was a faint, breathless exhalation, a whisper of compliance, as if acknowledging Taissia’s presence while refusing to break the rhythm Yarosvet had demanded.

Yarosvet’s calm gaze swept over the two of them. “She will answer you with her obedience, Taissia. Do not disturb the flow,” he said, voice low, firm, carrying that quiet authority that made Elena’s muscles tighten further, her movements sharper, more determined.

Taissia’s smile deepened, and she leaned just slightly forward, observing the subtle arch of Elena’s back, the swell of her breasts, the way the leather handle seemed to merge with her very body. “Delightful,” she murmured, almost to herself, as if committing the scene to memory, her eyes never leaving the girl suspended before them.

Taissia’s hand extended with purpose and feather-light touch, closing gently around the tip of Elena’s braid. Her fingers tugged gently, teasing it toward her, and immediately the dark strands stiffened, pulled taut like a leash between them. The motion, subtle but insistent, sent a fresh, jarring shiver racing through Elena’s body.

Her eyes fluttered open, glassy and unfocused, lifting a dazed gaze to Taissia’s face. There was recognition there — an acknowledgment of the strange, electric command, of the shared tension — and a silent plea that needed no words.

And then the restraint she had maintained, the taut coiling of every muscle, broke with exquisite inevitability. A tremor ran from her hips through her spine, a gasp ripped from her throat, and her body convulsed in a shuddering, triumphant surrender. The crop, still held firmly in place by Yarosvet, became the axis of her release, while her braid, stretched and guiding by Taissia, marked the delicate thread between control and abandon.

Her legs quivered, her hands slackened slightly behind her head, and for a moment she hung there, suspended in the aftershocks, chest rising and falling, the sunlight catching every glisten of skin, every subtle ripple of taut muscle. Yarosvet’s calm, measured presence grounded her even as Taissia’s playful interference had sent her tumbling over the edge of sensation, leaving her trembling and utterly spent before them.

Elena, spent and trembling, let herself collapse into the chair, her body folding into Yarosvet’s steady embrace. The warmth of his arms, the measured weight of his hands, a quiet anchor after the storm of sensation, holding her steady as the world blurred around them.

Taissia, rising from the armrest with feline grace, left the tableau for a moment. She crossed the room, boots clicking softly against the polished floor, and moved toward the bathroom, the promise of water drawing her steps. The faint splash of running taps began to mix with the quiet rustle of fabric and the soft, lingering tension in the air, as sunlight continued to spill across the three of them, gilding skin, leather, and polished wood alike.

Elena melted into Yarosvet’s embrace, the tension in her limbs gradually giving way as the heat of his body and the firm steadiness of his hands coaxed her muscles into slow relaxation. Her breathing slowed, shallow tremors fading into languid sighs, while the braid, now slack and warm, draped across her spine like a dark ribbon.

Taissia returned. She knelt briefly beside Elena, lifting each boot gently, one after the other, and set them aside. Then, leaning closer, her fingers found the braid and began to undo it, letting the dark strands spill freely over Elena’s shoulders and down her back, brushing against her skin with feather-light care.

Elena, bare and softened by the embrace, straddled Yarosvet’s knees, facing him. She pressed against him, warmth against warmth, and watched with quiet fascination as Taissia undressed with

effortless grace. Each movement was deliberate, teasing, her hands tracing her own body, removing each article of clothing until she stood revealed and unadorned, the sunlight catching every curve, every line of her form.

At last, Taissia extended a hand toward Elena, and with a gentle tug, guided her from Yarosvet's lap. The two nude girls moved together toward the bathroom, the air between them charged with playful intimacy.

When Yarosvet entered some time later to check on them, he found them seated at opposite ends of the bathtub. The water rose to their breasts, caressing their nipples, soft waves rippling around them, and the sunlight danced upon the surface, gilding their wet skin. They talked quietly, voices gentle and intimate, smiles softening their faces, the shared warmth of the bath and the unspoken connection between them creating a tender, domestic counterpoint to the earlier tension.

Yarosvet entered just as Elena's gaze, curious and tentative, lifted toward Taissia. Her voice, soft and unsure, carried over the gentle lapping of water.

"Why... why did you react so calmly when you discovered me in your rooms?" she asked, the question tinged with lingering wonder and the faintest trace of apprehension.

Taissia's eyes met hers with a quiet amusement, lips curving in that sly, measured smile she always wore when revealing truths wrapped in teasing. "I've... learned not to be jealous of anything that gives pleasure to my master," she said, her voice soft, the words falling like smooth stones into the warm water between them.

Elena's breath caught, the confession threading itself into the rhythm of the bath. She pressed her fingers lightly against the surface, letting the warmth of the water and the weight of Taissia's calm presence seep into her, understanding in a new, subtle way the depth of the power and control that Yarosvet commanded — and how it shaped the strange, intimate harmony between them.

Elena's gaze lingered for a moment on the delicate line of Taissia's neck, and she murmured, a faint blush rising to her cheeks, "Your collar... it suits you very well."

Taissia's lips curved into a mischievous smile, and with feline grace, she pivoted in the bath. Her body shifted onto all fours, water rippling around her, and she presented herself to Elena with playful audacity. The curve of her back, the swell of her hips, and the subtle gleam of the plug nestled between her buttocks caught the light, sparkling like a secret jewel. Elena's breath hitched, a mix of astonishment, curiosity, and something far more intimate stirring in her chest.

Elena's eyes widened, curiosity mingled with a faint shiver, and she asked in a hushed voice, "What... what is that?"

Taissia's back arched gracefully, her hips tilting so that the gleaming ornament caught the light. Her voice carried over her shoulder, low and teasing, as if speaking a secret meant only for Elena. "It's a special metal ornament," she said. "I wear it in my... back passage as an added mark of my belonging to him."

Elena's breath caught, the explanation sinking in with a mixture of awe and intrigue. The water lapped gently around them, reflecting the sunlight in shifting patterns over skin and metal, as the quiet intimacy of the revelation threaded itself into the charged stillness of the bath. Yarosvet remained nearby, his presence calm, measured, yet in that suspended moment it was as if the two girls existed in a world where his authority and their curiosity intertwined seamlessly.

Taissia rose first, water dripping in rivulets from her skin as she stepped aside, letting Elena remain in the bath. Yarosvet leaned over the edge, hands warm and deliberate, and began to lather Taissia with a slow, measured thoroughness. His palms glided over her shoulders and along the graceful curves of her back, working the soap into every line of muscle, down the arch of her spine, over the swell of her hips. Fingers traced the hollow beneath her ribs, kneaded the soft flesh of her buttocks, before sliding around to her thighs, calves, and the feet that had carried her with such agile poise. Each movement was exacting, attentive, turning the simple act of washing into a careful ritual of touch and observation.

Meanwhile, Elena's voice wove a story through the gentle splashing and the faint scent of soap. She recounted the circumstances of their first meeting with Yarosvet, the peculiar twist of fortune that had brought them together, and the work she had undertaken to sustain herself before this moment. Her words flowed in a quiet, confiding tone, each syllable laced with the soft cadence of memory and subtle emotion.

Taissia remained standing in the warm water, her body glistening, hips shifting slightly to keep her balance. Yarosvet's hands, so careful and deliberate, moved to her groin, fingers lathering the delicate, dark curls of her pubic hair, kneading and smoothing with precise attention. The soap foamed between his palms, glinting in the sunlight as he worked, each stroke both intimate and methodical.

She tilted her head, the faintest flush rising to her cheeks, and spoke, her voice low and thoughtful, carrying over the gentle splash of the bathwater. "I could never... I could never have brought myself to stand so openly, naked like this, in front of other men," she admitted, a mixture of pride and self-reproach threading her words. Her gaze drifted to the water, to the curve of her own reflection, yet there was no shame, only the honest reckoning of her courage, or the courage she had learned in surrender.

Elena's voice floated softly across the water, carrying a trace of thoughtfulness and quiet intimacy. "When I performed," she confessed, eyes lowered, "I always felt... as if I weren't in front of strangers at all, but in front of a mirror. As though I were watching myself through their eyes, and all I wanted was to be pleasing — to myself, to see myself as I wanted to be seen."

The admission seemed to deepen the intimacy of the room, her vulnerability contrasting with the quiet command of Yarosvet's hands as he continued to lather Taissia, and with Taissia's alert, amused gaze, attentive to every nuance of Elena's confession.

Taissia's lips curved into a faint, knowing smile, her dark eyes glinting with amusement and satisfaction. "I prefer to look at myself through the eyes of my beloved master," she murmured, settling back into the warm water, letting it lap gently around her chest. Her posture was relaxed now, playful and confident, a quiet contrast to Elena's lingering shyness.

It was Elena's turn. She rose slowly, water cascading over the curve of her body, and Yarosvet's hands moved with the same careful precision as before. He began at her shoulders, palms gliding down over the swell of her breasts, kneading the taut flesh, tracing the curve of her waist, and over the gentle hollow of her stomach. Every motion was deliberate, coaxing the soap into a smooth lather that glimmered across her skin.

When he had attended thoroughly to the front, Elena shifted gracefully, turning to present her back. Yarosvet's hands followed the line of her spine, working from the nape downward, kneading along the shoulders, over the arch of her back, along the rounded swell of her buttocks, and down her thighs. The water rippled around her, the sunlight catching the glistening soap and wet skin, creating a soft, luminous tableau.

Taissia's eyes watched Elena attentively, curiosity and amusement mingling, while the quiet intimacy of touch, confession, and shared space bound the three of them in the gentle, charged rhythm of bath and conversation.

Taissia leaned back in the bath, eyes following Yarosvet's careful movements as his hands glided over Elena's shoulders and down the curve of her chest, lathering her nude body with precise, attentive care. She spoke easily, her voice carrying over the gentle splash of water, full of warmth and quiet amusement.

"Inga is a wonderful companion," Taissia began, a soft smile curving her lips. "We had such pleasant conversation all the way. The stanitsa impressed me as well — so large, with friendly people everywhere, really everything one could need for life."

Her gaze drifted for a moment to Elena, watching her tense and shiver under the touch of Yarosvet's hands, and she continued with a gleam of mischief and certainty. "And Zlata... you will

surely fall for her. As Inga promised, she has a very beautiful face and, clearly, a superbly flexible, graceful figure.”

Taissia’s voice softened slightly, carrying a hint of conspiratorial affection. “We agreed that as soon as she is settled with Inga, they’ll let us know about the possibility of meeting.”

Elena, feeling the soap gliding across her skin, absorbed Taissia’s story with a mixture of curiosity and admiration, while the sunlight flickered across the wet surfaces, gilding the intimate tableau with warmth and gentle closeness.

Taissia, watching with an impish glimmer in her eyes, tilted her head and remarked lightly, as though chiding him for carelessness:

“You did not soap her properly between her cheeks, my master.”

Elena flushed, her lips parting in a soft gasp, while Yarosvet’s gaze settled upon her with deliberate weight. Then, as if nothing more needed to be said, Elena lowered herself once more into the bath, sliding opposite Taissia, their shoulders barely rippling the surface. Both lifted their faces toward Yarosvet, eyes wide and submissive, as though awaiting a silent verdict. He let them linger there a moment beneath his gaze, before filling the ladle with warm water.

“Stand,” he commanded.

The two girls rose together, their bodies glistening, water streaming down their thighs and calves, their breasts lifted and pearly with droplets. They turned obediently before him, offering every line of their forms to his scrutiny. Yarosvet raised the ladle and poured slowly over Elena first, the stream sliding down her collarbone, parting between her breasts, coursing along her belly before breaking against the hollow of her hips. Then he filled it again and tilted the arc of water upon Taissia, the stream darkening her hair, streaming along her back, dividing to run between the taut curves of her buttocks and down the back of her thighs.

He moved between them in turn, each cascade deliberate, like a priest administering ablution, until both stood shining, rinsed clean, their skin shivering under the caress of falling warmth. They kept their eyes upon him, waiting still, as though the true command was yet to come.

He offered them his hands, steady and commanding, and helped each girl step carefully over the rim of the bath onto the waiting rug. The water traced little rivulets down their gleaming bodies, darkening the fabric beneath their feet. Taking up a thick towel, he drew it slowly along Taissia’s skin first, then Elena’s, blotting the droplets with a care that was almost ceremonial. Neither their playful laughter, half born of ticklishness, nor their wriggling escapes from the cloth made him hurry. He dried them as if attending to some precious vessels, his calm composure standing in contrast to their girlish mirth.

Before he could finish with Elena, Taissia slipped deftly into motion. With a sly determination she reached for the buttons of his waistcoat, her wet fingers fumbling yet persistent, tugging away the layers that still set him apart from their shared nakedness. When he released Elena from the folds of the towel, she too leaned in, her hands finding seams and clasps, eager to assist. In four eager hands his garments vanished — shoes, jacket, shirt, the last reluctant folds — until he stood stripped of all pretence, his body bared to their gaze, as unguarded as they.

Elena’s eyes clung to him with a hunger she could scarcely disguise, her lips parted, her breath quickening as if she had forgotten the room, the bath, even Taissia’s presence. Every line of him seemed to mesmerise her — the breadth of his chest, the tautness of his abdomen, the heavy gravity of his sex — until she looked almost dazed, caught between awe and desire.

Taissia, practical amidst enchantment, did not linger. With a firm hand she lifted a robe and draped it across Elena’s shoulders, shielding her from her own shivers, before drawing her own garment tight around her slim frame. Then, as if rehearsed, the two of them guided him between them, steadying his step over the rim, until at last he lowered himself into the steaming bath, the water lapping against his skin in quiet acceptance of his arrival.

Taissia bent over the rim of the bath, her damp hair brushing his shoulder as she pressed her lips softly, possessively, to his own. The kiss was unhurried, a seal of her primacy, yet laced with tenderness. Elena, emboldened by that closeness and yet trembling with the innocence of daring, let her hand slip beneath the cloudy water. She could not see what she sought — only the shifting murk of soap and steam — but her fingers found him with startling certainty. A gasp caught in her throat as she closed around him, stroking with a reverence half devotional, half fearful, as though she touched something forbidden and yet irresistible.

Her breath quickened, her eyes wide and almost dazed, until she glanced upward and met Taissia's gaze. The other girl's lips curved in that unmistakable, cunning smile — half indulgence, half challenge. Without breaking the kiss, Taissia's hand sank into the water as well, slipping along the path Elena's fingers already claimed. Beneath the surface their hands brushed, collided, then clung together, both gripping him, both vying and sharing in the same rhythm.

For a few charged moments they moved in unison, two sets of delicate fingers tracing the same hard line, their touches mingling, their breath coming faster. And he, leaning back against the marble rim, closed his eyes with deliberate composure, as though nothing of import transpired, though every nerve in his body betrayed the silent pleasure of their combined devotion.

At last it was Taissia who loosened her hold, withdrawing her hand with a trace of mischief still playing in her eyes. She reached for the edge of the bath, found the sponges, and with unhurried composure pressed one into Elena's uncertain fingers, keeping the other for herself. By then he was already rising, water streaming in glistening rivulets down the planes of his chest and thighs, each drop catching the light as though cast from molten glass.

They leaned towards him almost ceremoniously. Taissia dipped her sponge, working it to a soft lather, while Elena, imitating her every motion, did the same. Then, with a kind of conspiratorial devotion, they set about him together — one stroking along the firm breadth of his shoulders, the other tracing down over his abdomen and hips — covering his skin with fragrant foam until the shimmer of water was replaced by a sheen of white. Their movements overlapped, alternated, merged into a rhythm of care and claim, their slender arms crossing before him, their bodies pressing close in their eagerness to tend him.

He stood tall amidst their ministrations, eyes half-closed, letting the twin currents of their touch glide over him: the swift, assured circles of Taissia, and the more tentative, lingering passes of Elena, each leaving its own imprint upon his gleaming flesh.

Taissia's sponge glided first along the broad planes of his chest, her fingers kneading the taut muscles beneath, the lather yielding under the press of her palms. She traced the ridges of his collarbones, circled the swell of his pectorals, then moved lower, teasing the hard curve of his abdomen, letting the foam slip between the navel and the jut of his hips. Her touch was confident, playful, with a faint edge of challenge — as if marking him hers even in the shared intimacy of the bath.

Elena, still catching her breath from her earlier audacity, followed in softer, more delicate strokes. Her hands drifted over the same terrain, pausing at the swell of his chest, brushing the taut skin with reverent curiosity, lingering on the gentle dip of his lower ribs and the firm line of his abdomen. She allowed herself the smallest daring, letting her fingers roam along the crease of his groin, brushing against the curve of his thighs, tentative yet eager, the thrill of being so close mingling with the fear of doing wrong.

Taissia's movements descended, fingers slipping over the outer ridges of his thighs, kneading the taut muscles, teasing the sensitive skin behind his knees, and finally circling the full length of his calves. She tilted her sponge, letting a thin ribbon of lather run along the back of his legs, the water carrying it down in delicate rivulets.

Elena mirrored her, though with a softer, more deliberate pressure, tracing the inner thighs, the taut lines connecting hips to knees, brushing over the subtle swell of his gluteal muscles, daring, yet

measured. Her fingers drifted across the sensitive crease where the thigh met the pelvis, teasing the slick skin beneath the suds, learning every contour as her gaze flicked up to watch his composed face.

They moved in tandem, overlapping yet distinct: Taissia's bold, commanding strokes contrasted with Elena's tentative, explorative ministrations. Occasionally their sponges brushed together, and laughter or small gasps punctuated the steady rhythm of lathering. The water shimmered around them, carrying the soap, their warmth, and the charged intimacy of shared daring. And he, still standing amidst the twin devotion, let each touch trace a map over his body, a living testament to their contrasting courage and curiosity, pretending indifference even as every nerve thrummed with the awareness of their ministrations.

Yarovet shifted, turning slowly so that his back faced them, the muscles of his shoulders and spine flexing as he leaned slightly over the bath's edge. The water gleamed over the curve of his buttocks, and the girls' hands followed instinctively. Taissia's sponge traced deliberate circles along the firm planes, gliding over the slope of each cheek, pressing just enough to feel the taut flesh beneath, then dipping lightly into the sensitive cleft between them, teasing the slick skin there with confident precision. Elena, more tentative, explored the subtle ridges of the lower back and the curve where buttocks met thighs, her fingers brushing the hidden recess with a mixture of awe and shy curiosity, mindful of the slippery warmth beneath the soap.

After a few measured moments, he pivoted, presenting his front to them. The two girls adjusted seamlessly: Elena dropped to her haunches, her eyes wide with reverent concentration as her small hands moved along the underside, cleaning the base, the shaft from below, and carefully attending to the scrotum, lifting, rubbing, and smoothing, letting the foam coat every curve. Taissia remained standing, poised and commanding, her sponge gliding from the tip of his stiffened member downward to the thick base, her palms pressing lightly as she worked the lather into every contour, tracing the taut veins and ridges with deliberate mastery.

The contrast of their ministrations created a rhythm all their own — one delicate, exploratory, almost reverent; the other bold, assured, teasingly possessive. Their hands occasionally brushed, sending small shivers across his taut skin, yet he remained composed, eyes half-closed, letting them tend him as though each movement of sponge and fingers were a necessary rite. The water rippled around them, carrying the glimmer of foam and the warmth of their bodies, the charged intimacy building with every stroke, every careful, daring exploration.

Taissia's eyes flicked toward Elena, a knowing glint in their depths. "You're about to say something," she remarked lightly, her voice teasing yet soft, leaning just enough to let the comment brush across the charged space between them.

Elena's cheeks warmed, her gaze dropping for a moment to the glistening water and the polished skin beneath her hands. Then, with a quiet, almost hesitant voice, she admitted, "I never imagined... that a naked man could be... so... pleasant. Both to look at and to touch."

Elena's fingers, emboldened by her own admission, moved with a newfound confidence, tracing the slick length of him from below with firmer, surer strokes, exploring the warmth and weight beneath her hands. She let her thumbs circle the base of his scrotum, teasing the sensitive skin there, pressing gently yet insistently as though to memorize every contour. The slight shiver that ran through him under her touch only spurred her, a delicious mix of fear and delight sparking in her chest.

Taissia, noticing the shift, leaned a fraction closer, her movements becoming bolder, more playful. Her sponge and palms glided along the top of his shaft, from tip to base, caressing the taut skin with deliberate pressure, rolling the slick lather over every ridge, every vein, guiding Elena's hand with subtle adjustments, teaching as much as sharing. She pressed just enough to make him arch into her touch, letting the water carry the sensation, while her eyes sparkled with both mischief and quiet command.

The rhythm between them deepened: Elena's tentative, explorative ministrations merged with Taissia's assured, teasing strokes. Their hands brushed, overlapped, occasionally collided in a shared,

silent game of dominance and indulgence, and the bathwater rippled with the combined warmth of their bodies, the glimmer of lather, and the electric intimacy of their touch. Yarosvet remained composed, eyes half-closed, letting their fingers map him fully, letting them learn the weight, heat, and subtle tremors of his body, even as the faintest sighs escaped him under the careful, combined ministrations of the two girls.

Taissia tilted her hand, letting a warm stream flow over his shoulders, tracing the curve of his chest before spilling down the hollow of his abdomen and the swell of his hips.

Elena positioned her palms beneath the falling water, guiding it, smoothing it over him, following every slope and ridge. Their movements were wordless, perfectly coordinated: Taissia directing the flow, Elena enhancing it with gentle, precise pressure, the water becoming a medium for their shared attention and intimacy.

Yarosvet remained still, letting the warmth and movement wash over him, while the girls moved in harmonious rhythm, each caress and stream blending into a sensuous, unspoken devotion.

With careful hands, the girls helped him out of the bath, wrapping him in their towels, pressing the soft cloth against every slick contour of his body. They wiped him thoroughly, the fabric warm and absorbent against his damp skin. Once done, the towels slipped to the floor, forgotten in the heat of the moment, and they guided him toward the bedroom.

Taissia darted ahead to the balcony, shutting the forgotten door with a soft click, sealing out the chill of the afternoon air, before returning to the warmth of the room.

In the bedroom, Yarosvet stretched out on his back atop the bed, the sheets beneath him rumpled by the shifting of his weight. Elena, following Taissia's example, lowered herself to her knees at his feet, her gaze fixed on him with a mixture of awe and desire. He extended himself fully, letting every line of his body present itself.

Leaning forward, the girls began with reverent, delicate attentions: lips brushing along the arches of his feet, tongues tracing the contours of his toes, the warmth of their mouths igniting a subtle shiver along his skin. Each movement was attentive, exploratory, a silent offering of devotion, while Yarosvet reclined, letting the sensation wash over him, half-closed eyes betraying the pleasure hidden beneath his composed exterior.

Elena's lips traced the tops of his feet, then slowly along the sides, tasting, teasing, while her fingers gently massaged the arches and heels, exploring the warmth and tension beneath the skin. Taissia, kneeling beside her, let her tongue follow a parallel path, gliding along the inner curve of his feet, occasionally brushing Elena's fingers as if marking the rhythm of their shared devotion.

Their attentions gradually moved upward: heels to ankles, ankles to the firm rise of his calves. Elena's hands slid along the back of his legs, pressing and smoothing, while her lips and tongue worked the soft skin beneath his knees. Taissia's motions complemented hers from above, tracing the outer curves, sliding closer to the powerful lines of his thighs.

When they reached the junction where thighs met pelvis, Elena's hands trembled slightly, hesitation mingled with curiosity, but Taissia's confident guidance encouraged her. Slowly, their lips and fingers moved higher, caressing the warm, taut flesh, teasing the sensitive lines leading to him.

Finally, their gazes met, and the unspoken understanding passed between them. Elena sank lower, lips and tongue brushing along the right side of his shaft, exploring its fullness from base to tip, occasionally flicking along the slick skin around the scrotum. Taissia mirrored her movements on the left, lips and tongue tracing every curve and ridge with confident precision. Their motions intertwined — two rhythms converging, alternating, yet always perfectly in sync — while Yarosvet lay back, letting the sensations roll over him, a deep, quiet tension coiling through his body as each movement drew a shiver he could not fully suppress.

Taissia's lips moved sensuously along his shaft, her gaze occasionally flicking toward Elena, assessing her reactions. She understood instinctively that this was all new to Elena — that the sensation of a man's arousal was a foreign, thrilling landscape she had yet to explore. With subtle guidance,

Taissia showed her, first with gentle, teasing motions, how to retract the foreskin with her lips, how to let the tongue trace the sensitive tip, rolling it in slow circles. She demonstrated once, then, with a knowing glance, yielded the position to Elena, giving her the chance to feel and mimic the sensations herself.

Elena watched intently, mesmerized, as Taissia enveloped him halfway in her mouth, lips and tongue working in fluid, confident strokes. She felt the soft pull, the subtle warmth, the slick friction, and then, as Taissia drew back, she hesitated only a heartbeat before leaning in herself, repeating the motions with careful attention. Taissia observed from the side, guiding silently with her eyes, letting Elena discover the rhythm, the texture, the exquisite vulnerability of the moment, ready to step in and correct, teach, or yield again as the unspoken lesson unfolded.

Taissia inclined herself ever so slightly, her voice a low, measured murmur, infused with a delicate blend of mischief and quiet command. “Our master is... unusual,” she said. “Another man would have long since reached the limit, spilling himself over us, yet he holds back, as he chooses, no matter how eagerly we work. We must be grateful — grateful that he allows us to play with him, to explore, to take pleasure at our own pace, without rush, without demand.”

Elena listened, cheeks warming, eyes wide with a mix of awe and newfound understanding. The words settled over the moment like a guiding current, framing the indulgence of their touch not as mere thrill, but as a gift, a shared intimacy sanctioned entirely by his restraint. Taissia’s lips brushed against him again, soft, teasing, as if reinforcing the lesson through motion as much as speech, and Elena, attentive and eager, mirrored her carefully, absorbing both instruction and sensation in equal measure.

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