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1 - The Keeper of Magic

The ship cut through the cobalt blue waters of the Aegean Sea. In the master suite, Claire stood before the full-length mirror. From her height of five foot ten, she contemplated her own curves, a silhouette sculpted by a will of iron. Her skin, already bronzed by the Greek sun, contrasted with the pristine white of the linen sheets. She wore nothing, savoring the sea breeze blowing through the open porthole.

Her thoughts drifted toward Léa. She had observed her for three days. Léa was not a prey; she was an invitation. That evening, Claire decided to go on the offensive. She invited Léa to her suite under the pretext of social pleasantries, but as soon as the door closed, the

setting changed. The blue of the sea became the witness to their first physical encounter. Claire, with that natural authority that already characterized her, invited Léa to approach the porthole. Under the pretext of showing her the moon's reflections on the foam, she placed her hands on the young woman's hips.

The contrast was striking: Claire's cold strength against Léa's shifting softness. They united with a wild freedom, exploring the taboos of a chance encounter. Claire used Léa to test her own power of seduction, while Léa gave of herself with a generosity that seemed to fuel Claire's ambition.

It was in this embrace, amid crumpled sheets and the scent of salt, that Claire confided her project to Léa: the upcoming auction. She sensed that this

journey was merely the prologue to a much vaster play. For Claire, every woman she chose possessed two souls, two distinct realities that she took pleasure in orchestrating. On one side, there was the woman of the dawn, the one stepping out of the shower.

Under the hot spray of the master suite, Léa became a primitive creature again, almost vulnerable. Without artifice, her skin flushed by the heat, her wet hair clinging to her temples and her gaze washed of all intent, she was the raw truth. Claire loved this "organic" version, this vulnerability that was not weakness, but a blank page. In those moments, the intimacy was silent, almost sacred.

Then came the metamorphosis. Claire watched Léa at the dressing table. Before her eyes, the ritual of makeup acted as a

rising tension. The stroke of eyeliner, the deep crimson lipstick, the powder that mattified the golden skin... it was the armor being put on. The woman who then stood up was no longer the creature from the shower; she was the woman of performance, the actress ready to step onto the studio set of social life.

"You see, Léa," Claire whispered, placing a hand on her transformed companion's shoulder, "most people only see the mask. But true power is being both at once. It's knowing that under the makeup, there is the beast, and under the beast, there is the god."

This obsession Claire had for transition, this passage from naked being to absolute appearance, foreshadowed what she would later do with the "ointment of light": creating a third personality, a

vibratory identity that would finally merge the truth of the shower and the radiance of the makeup. The stopover in Milos was the turning point. Under a blazing sun, they found themselves in a shaded alley where a local antique auction was being held. Claire was immediately drawn to a tiny object: a small, carved black wooden box of surgical finesse. The patterns evoked intertwined, almost organic shapes. She acquired it for a modest sum, captivated by the object's aesthetic.

However, once on board, it was impossible to open. Neither blade nor force could overcome the invisible lock. Claire, intrigued but occupied by the pleasures of the cruise and her games of seduction with Léa, eventually tucked it away in her luggage, almost forgetting it in the tumult of her hectic life.

Two years passed. The building on Rue de Grenelle was already in her mind, but a spark, a catalyst, was still missing. One stormy night, Claire found the box again. This time, under the pressure of a simple stylus, the lock gave way with a metallic click that echoed like a sigh. Inside, on a bed of velvet decomposed by time, lay three small metal pieces. They were tarnished, oxidized by the centuries, but a cold energy emanated from them. As she handled them, Claire felt a strange vibration. On each of them, a symbol was engraved:

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2 - Shifting of Consciousness

She set down her cup and, with a slow movement, slid the shirt off her shoulders, letting it fall to the floor. She stood naked before him, bathed in the morning light that made her skin appear almost ethereal. The two marks on her hip shone like runes.

"This morning, you will go to the office. You will lead your merger meeting as if nothing is wrong. You will wear your power suit, your predator's mask. But..."

She leaned toward him, her breasts brushing Marc's chest, her warm breath on his lips.

"...every time you look at a female colleague, every time you sign a contract, you will feel a pressure here,"

she said, placing her hand on his lower abdomen. "A reminder that your body remained in this living room, at my feet."

She picked up one of the iron pieces, now lukewarm, and slipped it into the pocket of Marc's trousers, which he had just picked up.

"Keep it against you. It is your bond. If you try to fight my voice in your head, it will become incandescent again. Now, eat. You need your strength to pretend you are still a free man."

The conference room on the thirty-second floor was an aquarium of glass and steel, suspended above the city's roar. Around the smoked oak table, the shareholders' faces were masks of seriousness and figures. Marc was in his

place at the head of the table, his back straight in his bespoke suit. In appearance, he was the master of the game, the predator of finance. But beneath the luxurious fabric of his trousers, in his right pocket, the iron piece was a point of unnatural heat.

"Marc? The third-quarter projections, are you listening?"

The chief financial officer's voice seemed to come from another dimension. Marc nodded, but his fingers clenched under the table. At that precise moment, miles away, he knew that Claire had just woken from her nap. Suddenly, he felt her. It wasn't an image; it was a physical, brutal sensation. Claire had just run her fingers over the second mark on her hip.

A shockwave surged up Marc's spine. A crushing discharge of humid heat that took his breath away. His pupils dilated. Before him, the charts on the giant screen began to dance, replaced by the memory of Claire's porcelain skin.

"I... Yes, the projections," he began, his voice lower, laden with an unusual grain.

He slid his hand into his pocket and squeezed the iron piece. It instantly became scorching, a bite reminding him of his pact. He closed his eyes for a second. He then heard, distinctly, Claire's voice whispering against his eardrum amidst the meeting's hubbub:

"They only see your mask, Marc. But I see your chains. Tell them you accept the conditions. »

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