

THOMAS 3

THOMAS. A quick study, flipping through it on the train? You know it by heart!

VANDA. But hey, you said Vanda's proper in spite of her, what was it, professed something.

THOMAS. Her professed principles.

VANDA. Yeah. So you don't think she believes all this?

THOMAS. She says she does. Women's rights, yadda yadda.

VANDA. But you think she's only putting on a show or something? Like she's lying? I was just wondering why you said "professed principles" and not just, y'know, "principles."

THOMAS. It must have been all those beautiful Ps.

VANDA. Sold your soul for a mess of Ps, huh.

THOMAS. Guilty.

VANDA. Secretly, Thomas? You are *evil*.

THOMAS. Guilty.

VANDA/DUNAYEV. *In our society, a woman's only power is through men—yadda yadda—I want to see what Woman will be when she's men's equal in education and his partner in work. When she becomes herself—an individual.*

THOMAS/KUSHEMSKI. *You only say that because you yourself are so individual.*

Start

VANDA/DUNAYEV. *A man usually says that to a woman whose individuality he is about to undermine.*

THOMAS/KUSHEMSKI. *If you don't mind my saying so, you are not only a Greek and a pagan—and an individual. You seem to me to be a goddess.*

VANDA/DUNAYEV. *Really? Which one?*

THOMAS/KUSHEMSKI. *Venus.*

VANDA. And Vanda really *is* Venus, right? Am I crazy? She's like Venus in disguise or something, come down to get him. To, like, torture him.

THOMAS. Well... Not really... Or not exactly...

VANDA. Okay, I won't ask. You probably wanted it to be, like, ambivalent.

THOMAS. Ambiguous.

VANDA. Right, right.

THOMAS. Actually, it's the same story as *The Bacchae*, isn't it?

VANDA. Yeah! What's *The Bacchae*? Just kidding. It's an old play, right?

THOMAS. It's an old play.

VANDA. "*Citizens of Corinth!*" One of those plays? "*Behold this mortal man, Testiculus, cursed for his offenses to the gods and totally fucked for all eternity!*"

THOMAS. Yes, it's one of those plays. The god Dionysus comes down and reduces Pentheus the king of Thebes to a mass of quivering feminine jelly in a dress.

VANDA. Sounds hot.

THOMAS. The crazed women of Thebes—the Bacchae—tear Pentheus to pieces and Dionysus leaves triumphant.

VANDA. Oh, yeah, yeah, I think I saw that.

THOMAS. Except here it's not Dionysus, it's Aphrodite.

VANDA. Right! Remind me...?

THOMAS. Aphrodite is the Greek version of Venus.

VANDA. The same person.

THOMAS. Same goddess.

VANDA. Hail, Aphrodite!

THOMAS. Hail, Aphrodite! Am I insufferably pedantic?

VANDA. Yup. But it's kinda cute. What are we doing?

THOMAS/KUSHEMSKI. *You seem to me to be a goddess.*

VANDA/DUNAYEV. *Really? Which one?*

THOMAS/KUSHEMSKI. *Venus. But could Venus's pagan principles work in our more civil century? And without slaves? The Greeks only lived as freely as they did because they had slaves.*

VANDA/DUNAYEV. *Then I seem to be in need of one. Would you be my slave, Herr Doktor Kushemski?*

THOMAS/KUSHEMSKI. *Happily. Give me a woman honest enough to say, "I am Pompadour, I am Borgia, I am the mistress to whom you are bound"—and I'll kneel to her.*

VANDA/DUNAYEV. *But where would Aphrodite find her master today?*

THOMAS/KUSHEMSKI. *No man is worthy of dominating a goddess. He's only worthy of being subjugated by her.*

(He kneels.)

Subjugate me.

(A moment. She laughs.)

VANDA/DUNAYEV. *What, in love with me already?*

THOMAS/KUSHEMSKI. *Profoundly. And suffering as if I'd known you all my life.*

VANDA/DUNAYEV. *Stand up. Stand away from me.*

(He moves away and stands.)

I must say you do intrigue me. I like your earnestness and your clarity of thought. Your great knowledge, your depth of feeling. Physically you are not unattractive. But when a man submits to me, I see a trick.

THOMAS/KUSHEMSKI. *This is no trick. Only love me.*

VANDA/DUNAYEV. *You see? Orders already.*

THOMAS/KUSHEMSKI. *Marry me.*

VANDA/DUNAYEV. *I'm a frivolous woman, Herr Kushemski. You'd have to be very brave to love me. I've told you my principles and how I live.*

THOMAS/KUSHEMSKI. *I only know that I want you to be my wife.*

VANDA/DUNAYEV. *You don't really know a thing about me.*

THOMAS/KUSHEMSKI. *Dominate me.*

VANDA/DUNAYEV. *It's absurd.*

THOMAS/KUSHEMSKI. *In time you'd only try to wrest power from me, as every lover does. Why waste time in the struggle? I hand all power over to you in advance, now and forever. Unconditionally. Dominate me. Do with me what you will. Beat me if you like.*

VANDA/DUNAYEV. *Well, this is certainly novel.* **Stop**

THOMAS. *Stand over there.*

VANDA. *What?*