

## VANDA 2

### Start

THOMAS/KUSHEMSKI. *I'm willing to take the risk. In any case, there you have me. Whatever that makes me.*

VANDA/DUNAYEV. *I know what you are. You're a supersensualist. An ascetic voluptuary.*

THOMAS/KUSHEMSKI. *And you, Frau Vanda von Dunayev, who or what are you?*

VANDA/DUNAYEV. *I'm a pagan. I'm a Greek. I love the ancients because they're not the moderns, who live in their mind, and because they're the opposite of the Christians, who live on a cross. I don't live in my mind, or on a cross. I live on this divan. In this dress. In these stockings and these shoes. I want to live the way Helen and Aspasia lived, not the twisted women of today, who are never happy and never give happiness. Why should I forgo any possible pleasure, abstain from any sensual experience? I'm young, I'm rich and I'm beautiful, and I shall make the most of that. I shall deny myself nothing.*

THOMAS/KUSHEMSKI. *I certainly respect your devotion to principle.*

VANDA/DUNAYEV. *I don't need your respect, excuse me. I will love a man who pleases me, and please a man who makes me happy—but only as long as he makes me happy, not a moment longer.*

THOMAS/KUSHEMSKI. *To a man, there's nothing crueller than a woman's infidelity.*

VANDA/DUNAYEV. *To a woman, there is: the enforced fidelity of men.—Can I move around?*

THOMAS. *Yes, move.*

VANDA/DUNAYEV. *In our society, a woman's only power is through men. Her character is her lack of character. She's a blank, to be filled in by creatures who at heart despise her. I want to see what Woman will be when she ceases to be men's slave. When she's his equal in education and his partner in work. When she becomes herself. An individual. —God, old Vanda's seriously ahead of her time, isn't she.*

THOMAS. *Leopold von Sacher-Masoch was. Vanda, how did you learn all those lines?*

VANDA. *I dunno. I'm a pretty quick study.*

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.*

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? **STOP***

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.*