Mother of Hope

by amphisbaenawormlizard

Summary

Vivianne Tray, the former slave of famous Galdanedian scientist, Makantara born Artri Nathoo Kennert, after escaping from XY Zone has settled again on the planet she was raised on. Not so long ago, she began to study biology under the false name of Efi Milton in Algar city but visits her family every third weekend. One day she decides to make a surprise for them and arrives to the Argossynian capital outside of her usual schedule and without the previous announcement. As the first one she meets the old friend of hers, and more lately also a lover, Wotan Sawter. After the evening spent in the man's company she stays in his flat for the night.
Argossynian capital. A few months after the events described in the end of the previous part of the story.

When she woke up there were restraints on her hands and ankles. It was like a terrifying déjà vu.

“What happened?” she asked with the trembling voice. “It’s not funny, Wotan, I have not agreed to this!”

“I know,” the man emerged from the darkness of the adjoining room. “I’m not happy because of it too but I have no choice. They will kill me if I refuse.”

“Who?”

“XY-ers. Who else would want Marren’s sis for interviewing her about most vital Argossynian secrets?”

“I know nothing!” she shouted, “Christine is far too wise to share any classified information. Least of all with me. After my return from the other area? She would be crazy! Couldn’t you tell them that?”

“I’m sorry.” He said unperturbed. “They promised to pay me, and I’m in terrible debts. I’m really sorry Vien, you are a good girl and very skilled in bed but I need that money.”

“How can you?” Vivianne groaned. “You were my first, please don’t do this. We can pay you too, Christine and me.”

Wotan didn’t listen to her at all. “I’m sorry,” he repeated like a zombie. Vivianne noticed there was an injection tube in his hand.
“Are you kidding me? She’s a civilian, with literally nothing in common with their military structures! If one wants any kind of useful information, taking my ex is most stupid choice. I could swear they did it to spite me. To show how impotent I am!” Artri couldn’t calm down. Certain institution was keeping his former slave, refusing firmly to hand her back to him, despite many requests to do so.

“It’s such a scandal. We have to do something with it, Tommy,” he groaned. Not being able to act efficiently in the situation like this was grating on his nerves enormously. “They will pay for this!” He hissed. And then his communicator came to life.

“Yes, of course!” The physicist involuntarily clenched the fist while listening to his interlocutor from the other side of the channel. “I’ll be there as soon as possible.”

Seeing his proud Argossynian, naked and beaten by someone else was a kind of terrible shock. Art needed almost all of his willpower to not lash at guards who led him to Vivianne’s cell.

“Do we have to restrain her?” one bloke asked.
“It won’t be necessary,” Artri gave him the contumacious stare. The guard tried to argue but Artri silenced him, so the man relented, not offering him his unwanted help anymore.
“As you wish, Mr. Kennert,” he complied meekly.
“I certainly wish,” Artri could not stand him. “Now leave us alone. I will call you if need be.” What a relief to get rid of these idiots.

Now he could approach the girl. Artri did it slowly, to not scare the poor child more than she already was.

“Please, get up, I have brought you something to wear. I’m sorry we didn’t show up earlier, but I have to keep up appearances.” It wasn’t exactly true but Art could not tell her what a real reason of his late arrival was.
The answer was silence. “Vien?” Artri urged her to react but the young woman only tightened her grip on her knees. Her whole body was shaking. Artri wanted to embrace her, to soothe her fears, but he knew it wouldn’t be the best idea with the current state of her mind.

“Squirrel, please. I promise nobody will hurt you anymore.” He tried to sound firm but soft at the same time.

“Well,” Vivianne answered at last “Throw it to me and don’t look while I dress.”
“As you wish,” Artri felt partial relief. She talked so maybe further communication will be also possible.

The girl quickly pulled on all the articles of clothing he gave her.
“Where are you taking me?” Vivianne’s voice was still shaky.
“To the place where you’ll be safe. As much as it can be safe for a girl like you anywhere in The XY Zone. There we will discuss the best outcome without witnesses and think about our further steps.”

She didn’t protest when he asked her to put the collar on and there was no problem with reaching their means of transport. She could walk there by herself. When in the shuttle the girl curled up on her chair and almost immediately fell asleep.

Most precious human being was sleeping in his craft. What Artri should do to make her want to stay? What rewards he can promise her for the compliance? How to convince the girl he’s no longer her enemy? Too bad he knew about planned kidnapping and wasn’t able to stop it. Maybe he should warn them. He definitely should but did nothing. Why he couldn’t think about it when there was time to act? It may cost him dearly if only she knew.

“Where are we?” the girl asked, sitting upright with the back stiff and the look of extreme distress in her eyes.

“For now in my Argo, but we’ve landed on Perennis some time ago. I didn’t want to disturb your sleep though. You were so exhausted. But now when you’re awakened at last we can move you to somewhere more comfortable. Unless you’re hungry or…”

“Why do you care?” She spat. The fury he saw in her eyes in that small cell on Galdanede returned.

“Why do I care?” Artri looked at Vivianne disbelievingly. “It happens your are my most desirable guest so I’m just trying to be hospitable.”

“Hospitable?” she snorted, unconvinced.

“Are you always that hospitable before you kill someone?”

“Surely you exaggerate,” Artri made rather clumsy effort to turn it into the joke.

“I know what I have done. I have abandoned you on my planet. Surely you want revenge for leaving you that way. Isn’t it why I have been brought here, to end me without witnesses? Can you do it fast? If you ever felt something for me…”

“Squirrel, stop it, please. I know you hate me. It’s more than obvious now but you must know one thing. I have done terrible things and many, but killing helpless girls with cold blood is surely not one of them.”

Artri tried to sound calm and matter-of-factly, regardless of how much it pained him to be perceived that way. He reminded himself it was earned. He could blame only himself for all the lost chances and wrong choices he made.

“Listen,” the physicist continued, “if such would be your ultimate desire I can send you back from where you had been kidnapped. But I’m afraid you won’t be safe there. Apparently they did not protect you. You really thought dying your hair and changing the name will be enough? Next time it may be Riadisans who would make the attempt at hurting you and it can end even worse.”

The Argossynian girl wanted to tell something but Artri silenced her.

“There will be ample time for discussing your future but now you need tending to your injuries, the
meal and more sleep. If you don’t want me to touch you, I’ll summon the doctor. Even Perry if he’s available. Do you agree?"

At last she looked at him more like at a human being than wild, bloodthirsty beast. “I think I don’t need the doctor just now. It hurt when they were doing it but now it somehow ceased. Tomorrow he can see me if you wish him to. Now I’d like to wash myself, something to drink, and the bed.”

“Now you sound more reasonable,” Artri nodded appreciatively. “Come, your former apartments are waiting.”

“I have changed nothing in your rooms,” Artri said when they reached the house. “But you can alter them, however you want as long as you’ll stay here.”

“No, thank you, master,” she answered.
Her discomfort while using the last word was painfully obvious.

Artri tried to smile. “You need not to call me that if you don’t feel like it. You can use my name if you wish, first or second or the last. It doesn’t matter, really… You can call me your dog or slave or whatever.” He was almost afraid to look at the girl. Will she ever be able to see in him something different from her mortal enemy? For now there was no way he could tell.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, the middle part contains the same scene as in Prologue to "Vien".
Morning musings

Vivianne woke up to the fragrant breeze caressing her hair and cheeks. It was coming through the open windows of the spacious room. The place was painted with pastel colours, with the furniture made of light wood. It was as comfortable as it was pretty. How was it possible her eyes didn’t open to grimy cell with bare floor like in the last terrible days? And only then she recalled what happened yesterday.

What was it Artri has told her? He’s opened to the possibility of sending Vien back. It would be the best outcome she could imagine. But was he honest with her or is it the trap, another one of his many manipulations? She has to wait and see. There’s literally nothing to lose. At first Vien was convinced, he came for her to have his revenge for the things, that happened on Makantara and Argossyne. And yet she could not be further from truth. The man has shown so much restraint. No word of condemnation came from his lips. Interesting. Maybe it was silly, but she was feeling much better today. Psychologically at least. Like there was at least a sliver of hope for her where yesterday Galdanedian morning she saw none.

Physically it was much worse. After the adrenaline level from the last days dropped Vien could feel, in its whole entirety, the aftermath of abuse they subjected her to. At least she told them nothing because, luckily, she knew nothing substantial. Did they really think Argossynian leaders share their most vital secrets with everyone and their dog? Or was it the demonstration of power, the way to show them, Argossynians, they cannot feel safe, because even beloved member of the family of one of their most influential leaders can be taken into slavery anytime. Sweet Goddess, she should warn them, Wotan was the traitor and the spy, before another innocent victim falls into his trap. She groaned involuntarily. Why all her lovers must betray her and lie to her? There were few of them but still. And Sawter felt so safe. Boring but safe. Seemingly the best antidote for other male’s dark possessiveness. And how it ended? The man was even worse.

And then another terrible thought appeared. Wotan knew she can pay with death for the money he was to receive for his betrayal. And yet he didn’t hesitate. She was nothing for him. He never cared about her. There was no other like Jon Caroll in her life. What a pity they ended only as friends.

Sad musings aside. She was here and has to deal with it as best as she can in her current situation. Vien has to act more wisely than before. She can’t let the others to manipulate her this time so easily. Feelings aren’t for her. They have led her astray too many times already. After resolving this she has thrown away the duvet. Vien felt tired still but she won’t be lying in bed the whole day. She must prepare herself for today’s negotiations. They were in fact negotiations of the lamb with the wolf. It was laughable, really, but at least Vien has to try.

When the girl stood up, she has noticed the tablet on the nearby table. There was the message for her on it. Vivianne tapped the screen.

\textit{Hi. I hope my favourite guest slept well under my roof. I understand you may not want to see me yet, so in such a case, I have placed everything you may need in your apartments. You have food synthesizer for your use too. And if you feel like needing the doctor, there’s the contact with Percy Salter below. You can call him yourself after breakfast. In case you need me I’ll be in my rooms, you know where. Wish you peaceful day.}

\textit{Your devoted slave. Artri Kennert.}
It was ridiculous. To have her so close, after all the nights and days he was dreaming about the girl, and to do nothing. Literally nothing.

Artri wondered if she has read his message at all. But soon the physicist knew, without the doubt, Vivianne did it. Percy Salter was standing at his threshold. Vien had to summon him.

“Hi, Perry! Please come in.” Artri welcomed the old medic.

“Good morning, Artrii,” Salter answered politely but with visible reserve. “Care to explain what happened?” Percy, as the scientist was well aware, haven’t been used to beat around the bush, especially when the well-being of his patients was involved. “You have assured me you let her stay free and now what?”

“It’s not what you think, Perry. Our security services decided she may have useful information, and it was all their doing. I haven’t been involved in any of this. I could retrieve her only after they had finished.”

“How convenient, don’t you think?” Percy gave him a sour look.

“What do you mean Perry? I did nothing.”

“Exactly,” the old man spat.

“Okay, it’s not the time for discussing this,” Artri didn’t want to argue. “Come, I’ll take you to her.”

“I’ll leave you alone,” Art offered, intending to get out of the room diplomatically, but the Argossynian surprised him.

“There’s no need, Nathoo,” she said. “You can stay if you wish. I have nothing to hide from you.”

It was so unexpected after yesterday’s accusations it rendered him speechless. Artri could only nod. Vien didn’t pay attention to him anymore, turning to Perry immediately.

“I thank you for coming that quickly. I’m sorry if I interfered with your schedule somehow.”

“No worries,” Percy gave the girl comforting smile. “You know I’ll always be for you, darling, if only your jealous wielder lets me.”

It was hard not to blush after these words but fortunately none of them paid any attention to the physicist at the moment.

“First,” the medic said, “before I’ll start the examination of your injuries, it would be helpful, if you could describe what it was your captors has done to you. If you’re able to talk about it, if not, sorry for even asking.”

“No, no, it’s okay,” Vivianne’s smile was almost serene. “Let’s sit and I will tell you. It was terrible but, thanks to my master, I was much better prepared for such painful interrogations than I would be if I would never meet him.”

It was almost too much for Artri to hear but he commanded himself to stay silent.

“Don’t worry, Nathoo,” she looked straight at him. “It’s not accusation this time. Knowing what to
expect, even remotely helped. I could say, sometimes, during the process, I was more angry for them than actually afraid. I somehow knew you will rescue me from them. And they had to know that too because I could feel they didn’t dare to go too far with their inventions.”

After saying this Vien, as if nothing important happened, turned again to the doctor. She described her last experience in a matter-of-fact and almost emotionless way. It was admirable. And now, Artri knew, she behaved like a true Argossynian. No flirting, no trying to please anyone, just bare facts. Precise and clear.

When she finished Percy asked her to undress. Seeing Vien without clothes was even more shocking in the bright light of day, with all the bruises and fresh scars visible. She didn’t even wince when the medic was examining her thoroughly before treating her injuries with various gels and lotions he had with him prepared for the occasion.

“That will be all for now,” he said. “Wait a few minutes and you can put your clothes on again. Most of it should heal completely after a few days. But after what you’ve just told me I’m afraid some places may stay sore despite the treatment. If so, it may indicate permanent nerve injury, which is sometimes the result of using certain pain generators. When such a thing occurs, you must summon me immediately because it would need minor surgery. I cannot tell for now if it’s the case with you. You have to wait and see.”

“Thank you, doctor,” Vien said. “You are the best,” she added enthusiastically.

“No need to praise me, darling, it’s my duty, nothing more.” Percy shrugged it off.

“And one more thing. I’m sorry for asking but I have to know. Have they made any kind of sexual assaults against you?”

“Fortunately, they didn’t dare. I think my status this side of Great Divide was protecting me to the extent, so no. But when we are at it… Before they took me into captivity I have been with one man. The same who betrayed me and handed me to them after drugging. I was on some form of contraception but knowing my cosmic misfortune… can you give me something to be a hundred percent sure I won’t end with his child in my belly?”

“No problem, darling,” Sawter answered. “And I’m awfully sorry it happened to you. It’s hard to comprehend why such a fantastic young woman attracts such hopeless jerks like those you were linked to.”
All this peace and understanding

They were both standing in the garden watching Salter’s craft gaining height.
“I’m sorry for what Perry said. Really sorry, he should not say such a thing.” Vien spoke first. She looked strange with the dark hair. Not bad, but something was off. His black Squirrel. Or maybe not his. Soon he will know.
“It doesn’t matter,” Artri assured her. “Remember, I know him far longer than you and he always behaved that way. Besides, he was right.”
Vien said nothing to this. Her expression unreadable for now.

“Don’t you want to rest?” Artri asked her instead.
“You must be tired. What about a dinner in bed? I can serve it for you. Just say what you want. Or maybe you prefer real food. I can order something you like…”

“You are not angry with me?” Vien answered with her own inquiry ignoring his nervous prattle.

“Me? And what for?” Artri couldn’t be more surprised than with the question like this. He could barely believe Vien was standing so close to him in the middle of his garden, talking with him in a civilized manner, not escaping from Art to the furthest corner of the mansion.

“For neglecting you the way I did. I knew what they accused you of and did nothing to help you. I knew about all the good things you have done when we were together and stayed silent.”

“Believe me, Viv, I can understand the sentiment behind your decisions. I can only blame myself for making you feel that way.” Artri answered as honestly as he could.

“And for sleeping with Wotan?” Another question came out.

“Why should I?” Artri sighed. “I have left you, okay, they made me, but, no matter how it happened, you were on your own. You had every right to take to bed anyone you wanted. The only thing I may be angry about was the fact he proved to be not that much better than me.”

“Well, in some areas that man was much, much worse than you, master.” Vien giggled. Actually giggled. It was unbelievable. He has brought her here, just yesterday, beaten and resigned to her fate. And now she seemed to regain her footing or at least most of it being able to laugh at her misfortune. Besides, she called him her master two times today, out of her own choice. Was it the promise of sorts? It was a foolish hope but Artri wanted to cling to it as long as it was possible.

“I’m sorry.” She stopped abruptly. “I don’t know what’s gotten into me. It’s not funny at all. If not you I could be dead by now after what he has done. So there’s the spy among them and there’s no way they could know about this!”

“I’m sure we can contact your sister somehow. And inform her you’re alive and safe. It must worry her sick, your disappearance.”

“Would you help me with it?” The hopeful look in her eyes was priceless.
“I thank you for willing to be helpful,” Vien sighed after the while, “but I’m afraid we cannot reach them from here, not drawing unwanted attention of your people.”

“Of course you’re right,” Artri agreed. “But there are certain ways to get around the difficulty.”

“Like what?” Now Vivianne was interested.

“Well, you can record the message for your family and we will send it to my friends on Makantara, and it can be sent further from there, with an ample level of discretion.”

Vien was unconvinced. “That friend of yours, master? He can be on the hook after all that happened in his ranch.”

“No, not Akela. It would be too risky, I agree. But he’s not the only one I’m in constant connection with. I cannot say more for now but there are my other fellow compatriots who will serve gladly me and my… and one brave Argossynian girl.”

“Oh, really?” Vien didn’t know what to think about this last proposition of the scientist. “I don’t know. You’ve said Makantarans resemble those from Riadis the most. And you think they’d like to take a certain risk to help mere slave?”

“Well,” Artri smiled this time. “I am Makantaran too and I feel like I could do anything for you to hate me a little less.”

“Master, please don’t!” Vien felt embarrassed because of his heartfelt declaration.

“I’m sorry for making you uncomfortable, but I mean it. And if it’s tantamount to freeing you from me permanently I have resolved to do it. If such will be your ultimate wish. I can only ask you to wait with your decision until we can discuss other outcomes of our last, unplanned encounter. Would you? Please?”

Vien couldn’t ignore the plea, besides it would be unwise to. Outwardly kind or not, it was the man, who was holding the leash, and it was totally not in her interest to spite him.

“I’m ready to consider all alternatives, that’s exactly what I intended to suggest before I called Perry instead.” She wasn’t lying. It was exactly what she wanted to do. Artri, it seemed, liked her answer.

“I thank you my lady for your undeserved leniency toward your errand slave,” he said bowing gracefully his black head. “And now let’s return to the matter at hand. Believe me, there are many people, if not exactly good... of course there are good too, like Perry or Chris Akela for example, but if not, then at least not contented with a current state of things. To be overpowered and practically governed by the brute faction can’t be comfortable for anyone with slightly wider perspectives.”

“Oh, but you still seemed to thrive in circumstances like these,” Vien blurted before she could think better.

The physicist didn’t look offended or even surprised by her words. “Yes and no,” he said. “Yes, because my position shelters me from any outright harassment. And no because there are certain ways to show me I’m not that untouchable I would like to think. I’m nearly sure what happened to you may be the part of it. I have no proof but that’s possible.”

“Isn’t it so I am to be partly blamed for this?”
“For capturing you?” Artri apparently didn’t catch her meaning.

“Yes, that too, to the extent but there’s no way I could discover Wotan was the mole. I meant with… what happened before…”

“This! I can’t deny it didn’t help, but the whole atmosphere is getting nasty. And this is one reason I would prefer to keep you close. But only if you’ll agree,” he added quickly.

“So now let’s get inside. I’ll make a few calls and you better think what to tell your sister. If it’s that important there’s no time to lose.”
Waiting for the answer

Recorded message was successfully sent, but Vivianne won’t be sure, if Chriss received it, until the answer arrives.

As if reading in her thoughts Artri said.  
“It will take time for the communication to work. My friend from Makantara won’t be using any of usual wormholes to deliver your recording and has to seek for circuitous road. It will be much slower but much more safe, both for us and for our helper. Hopefully, your sister or her partner won’t dismiss the message without watching it.”

“So how long it may take?” Vien asked.

“It’s hard to tell. We can receive the answer even tomorrow. So it would be futile to sit and wait. We will know when it will be here. If it will be. I’m sorry, I don’t want to give you any false hopes.”

“No, it’s okay,” Vivianne sighed. “I’m grateful even for trying.”

“You didn’t believe I’ll do this for you? Did you?” Artri wanted to know.

“Let’s say I had my doubts.” Vien smiled weakly. “But thank you for defying my expectations. It’s important for them to know about Sawter’s wrongdoings.”

“It’s even more important for them to be sure you’re safe,” the physicist noticed.

“But am I?” Vien risked another, most vital question.

“You are. Like in your mother’s womb. You know my motto, right?” The man answered with the smirk.

“I will let no one hurt you, I’ll do it by myself” Vien recited, trying to keep the serious expression on her face.

“Exactly,” Artri nodded. “I have let them hurt you once, and it was one time too many. So I have no right for the second part. But being serious, I think you have suffered already too much under my rule. No need to repeat the same mistakes.”

“But I wanted you…” Vien started but cut off.

“Wanted me executed?” the scientist finished in her stead. “You were sure I deserved it. But has your sister or Rhea told you I’m not guilty of any innocent death?”

“I… yes, Christine said so. And Karella too,” Vivianne confirmed.

“Good,” the physicist breathed out what was an undeniable sigh of relief. “Because you could still be unable to believe me. And now you need not believe in any of those things because you know. Your own people saw to it. What a paradox!”

“I suppose I should apologize,” she whispered.

“Come on, I have made you far more harm than judging you unjustly. If someone is to beg for forgiveness, it’s me. But I won’t tire you now with my burdened conscience. It’s not the time for that. I can see you aren’t feeling well enough to listen to my musings any longer. What about returning to bed? I hope I made it comfortable enough for you.”
“It’s perfect, thank you. But I don’t want to sleep. Not yet. I have planned to discuss my situation, as you have promised me we would, when we were on Galdanede yet. I surely would sleep better, knowing what will become with me. Can we do it now, master?”

“You wicked creature, you,” Artri shook his head. “You know exactly how to mollify me. I agree but on two conditions, you will eat something first and then will move yourself to the sofa. I don’t want to see you fainting.”

Vien had no other way but to comply. The cream of asparagus soup she asked for was tasty and well seasoned but her throat seemed to constrict when she tried to eat more. She could swallow barely a few spoonfuls.

“My poor child,” Artri probably recognised her problem, “no need to be nervous. You are so stressed. You will do as you wish and I will comply. You know I’m capable of recognising defeat. I have released Vai and let her be happy with someone else. I loved her but I did it. Because I loved her. And I can do it again. The only thing I want from you is to listen to my arguments. After that you can decide. I won’t be keeping you against your will. I tried this once, and it ended with disaster. I cannot have children with the person who hates me or is mortally afraid of me like Vaicia was. And one more thing. You are not supposed to make this decision in a hurry. I’ll give you enough time to think it throughly. And now, maybe you want tranquilizer before we begin? Something mild to sooth your nerves, hm?”

“No, I thank you, but no!” she shivered involuntarily.

“You sound like the one who thinks I want to drug you. I’m not that Wotan of yours. It won’t affect your free will or self-consciousness. It would be of no use if you were not fully yourself. I need to know what you really think. If I wanted you drugged, I could add something to that soup.”

“Yes, you’re probably right,” Vien responded. “But still I don’t think I need it.”

“Okay. If you wish. So, let me begin.”
Sleepless on Perennis

“There are things you must know about before you’ll be able to make any conscious decision regarding us. I’m aware I used to keep you in total darkness in too many fields. But one of them I think is most important. I know it may shock you at first but please wait with your judgement until I’ll finish. See, I’m nervous too. So, how to begin? Well. You’ve heard already about my twisted genetics. Our shared female friends were kind to inform you. But you ought to hear it from the main culprit, so to speak. My father was already the bearer of the changed Y chromosome. Not everyone on Makantara can afford such a thing but my family is wealthy enough, at least according to Makantaran standards, to take part in all advantages of such an arrangement. All he needed was to pass his material to the next generation. And he should but Vari is a very ambitious man, and he wanted more than that. He wanted not just the son but a genius of the child. So he hired the group of the best genetic engineers and tasked them with the goal.”

“They did as Varian wanted but warned him about some side effects which might, or might not occur, after interference in the genome structure. Because it wasn’t only his male chromosome, they partly altered autosomes too. And my father accepted the risk. He said the side effects they were predicting would not be dangerous for his child but only for the other persons dealing with them. So it’s not the problem of his. He was awfully wrong, but probably didn’t comprehend what they were all doing.”

“Did your mother know?” Vien asked.

“It’s hard to tell. It’s possible he wouldn’t inform her. But even if she knew I seriously doubt he would listen to her objections. Even if he truly loved Klea I don’t think he was willing to let her take part in the final decision. Or maybe she knew and accepted it. I’m not sure at all she was the better person than him...”

“Okay, but does it mean our prospective offspring will be like that? Will they share what you call ‘the curse’?”

“Not necessarily. But I’ll soon come to this. As the only child I always wanted the big family and thought about starting one fairly early. When I went to my doctor to tell him about my plans, he warned me my descendants may struggle with the same problem which was affecting me since becoming the adult. Unless, well... Stilton said it’s possible there is somewhere female human with genome complimentary to mine, who, after joining our respective parts will reverse unwanted effects of previous manipulation, while not affecting desirable ones. But, unfortunately, it’s very rare so I may never find such a person through all my life.”

“It was not very promising statement, I guess,” the girl looked at Artri almost with sympathy.

“Definitely. I was far more impatient than that, so when I met Vai and fell in love with her I was close to stop tormenting myself and just let it be. The fate had it she could not reciprocate my feelings, so the affair died by itself. I think it probably eased my pain of parting with her, knowing our children would have to fight with their genetic burden like I did. Or worse, they’ll accept it and become true monsters like one Thorstein Volterra for example. Or Bernet Haldane from whom we rescued our sweet Rissa. So I remained alone. Never took permanent partner while the search for my perfect female creature continued. Until one day when impossible has materialised itself before my eyes in the form of certain graphs and charts. They found her. It’s not that hard to guess now who it was.”

Artri stopped, waiting for the signs of discontent. But he saw nothing of the sort.
“My sweet Goddess,” Vien whispered. “It solves the mystery I was trying to untangle for so long. I always wanted to ask but never managed.”

“Pardon me?” Artri wasn’t sure if he heard it correctly.

“Remember when I walked into you the day after my presentation and before our second agreement? I was talking with Kari and seeing her I realized for the first time I don’t fit the place at such man’s side at all. Actually, I was looking for you to ask for explanations but was… soon distracted. And when I asked at last you were talking something about mutts.”

“Ivvi, sweetling, I’m sorry. That was stupid. As if I was any better, especially with the language like this, well…” He trailed off embarrassed.

“So now you know,” Artri continued after some time, “true reason behind picking you and not the other. But soon I realized genetics is not your only forte but least of all amazing qualities I received in the package. You are the creature from my dreams. I could not imagine better mother and nurterer for my children. I know, you had your own plans before meeting me. And I feel terribly asking you to abandon them, but being here you can do much more good. There are people who can fill in for you on Argossyne easily but I can’t see anyone suitable enough to do it here. In this place you are irreplaceable. This world needs women like you. I need you.”

It was hard not to be touched by the intensity of his speech. But Vivianne tried to not show it.

“So my offer still stands. You can accept it anytime and list your requirements. There’s almost nothing I could refuse you if you’ll resolve to stay. But if you’ll decide otherwise, I will let you go.”

Vivianne could not sleep. She could not stop the stream of her thoughts.

Being free was tempting. But Artri was right. To teach children on Argossyne was an important goal. But there were many candidates for the job. Nothing terrible happens if she wouldn’t be able to take it.

Children of Artri Nathoo though, it was a different matter. They will surely take the place as important and influential members of their society. To affect shaping of their minds, the way they perceive other people, their whole worldview was an enormous task and it could do much good in a further perspective.

If she’ll refuse Artri surely will find different candidate. He’s determined to have the family. And what if that other woman will be like Francesca? This would be the ultimate disaster. Such a perfect chance to change something lost because of her reluctance and selfishness. And even if it will be impossible to love the father, surely Vien will love her children with him.

And Artri himself, in his twisted kind of way is clearly infatuated with her. If she would be shrewd enough and less careless than before maybe she could keep permanent influence on him.

But she was afraid. And full of insecurities. It’s not fair, Vien thought. She’s too young to carry the weight of such an enormous responsibility. Why mother nature had to pair her, of all people, with such a man? Christine was the natural-born leader but her little sister is only ordinary Argossynian girl. She wanted only peaceful existence, personal fulfillment and unrestricted freedom.

But then again, how can she enjoy peace when her sisters in The XY Zone are constantly dying and suffering only because they were born with the wrong set of reproductive organs? She has the chance to start the change, to ease their fate. If not now than in the future. Will Vien be able to look in the mirror, knowing she had that chance, but thrown it away for purely selfish reasons?
The dawn found Vien sleepless.
Message from the free world

Artri didn’t want to disturb Vivianne’s much needed rest, but as the day progressed and she was nowhere to be seen the physicist started to worry. They tortured her after all and there was always possibility some late effects of the ordeal could show themselves.
To ensure maximum privacy there were no cameras placed in her rooms. Artri had to check by himself if everything is all right with his lovely guest.

The scientist felt almost guilty to enter without Vivianne’s not my, like some kind of pathetic stalker, but he had to be sure, she needs no help.
Already in her bedroom it relieved him to see the girl was just sleeping. In entirely healthy way, if not counting the silent snoring, which was endearing.
Young woman was naked under the duvet. Even if most of her body was obscured by the cover, the view of her bare knee made him feel the heat rising immediately. It was inescapable regarding circumstances. But he told himself to stop. No thoughts and urges like these. Vivianne was forbidden for Art until the girl herself lets him. If she lets him. But even if he’ll be lucky to have her permission to touch it won’t be today, it surely won’t be today. Everything was fine, he didn’t need to stand here anymore. It was time to evacuate. And immediately.

Before the physicist could turn around, sleeping woman’s instincts kicked in. She woke up and sat abruptly on the bed, covering herself up to the neck.
“What… what are you doing here?” She stammered.

“Nothing wrong. Easy. I only wanted to check if everything is okay with you.” Artri explained quickly. “It’s getting fairly late, and I wanted to be sure you need no help.”

“No, I don’t.” She was visibly unsettled. “I could not sleep until dawn. Has the message from my sister arrived, perhaps?”

Artri shook his head. He hated to disappoint her. “Not yet, unfortunately. But we must be patient. It can still reach us. I’ll leave you now. You can sleep. I’ll inform you as soon as it happens.”

“Oh, no,” she said. “I’ll rather dress up and we can wait together.”

It sounded almost promising.

Vivianne joined Art after a few minutes she needed for the shower. Luckily he wasn’t empty handed anymore. In the meantime they received much expected communication from Argossyne via his contact on Makantara.

“You can watch it only by yourself,” he offered.

“No,” she dismissed his suggestion without the hesitation. “I have nothing to hide. Let’s listen to the message together.”

Christine was worried. Even if she didn’t show it. But Vien knew better. Her beloved sibling was in slavery after all and in the might of the same man, who hurt her enormously and even if he was the epitome of politeness and restraint now, it could change anytime. She had to comfort her sister while not annoying her captor.
“Dearest Iven, I’m happy you are alive and safe and can only hope it will stay this way. We love you too much to bear the thought of losing you. I therefore allow you to do anything to keep yourself alive and well. It’s for you to decide what it would be, you are intelligent and mature enough to choose the best option. If you want to come back, we will welcome you with joy and delight, but if you would prefer to stay where you are, we can accept it too. You can be a valuable part of any society and be useful for our cause no matter where you stand. As for Wotan he’s beyond our justice now. Apparently he escaped to where he came, disappeared after handing you to your captors. Besides, Wotan Sawter wasn’t his true name. He was called Ringo Derice before installing himself as the spy among us. I hope I will hear from you soon. Remember, we love you and believe in you always.”

And it was all. Apparently Christine gave Vien her blessing, both as older sister and as her leader. But it didn’t make Vivianne’s future choice any easier.
Vivianne was sitting without the slightest move for the long time. Artri didn’t disturb her thoughts, accompanying the girl in silence.

“Will you… let me go free?” She asked.

Artri looked at her intently. “If this is what you want. But is it? Will you let the monster to stay alone, without supervision, without the leash kept in the firm hand, free to hurt the others for not being you? You are the one who can save the world from me. Don’t you want to try?”

“Are you threatening me?” This was Kennert much closer to the one she remembered from the last months before her escape.

“No. Not you. I’m only anticipating what may become of me when I’ll lose the last motivation to be better. It was not my choice to be evil but it may be to stop fighting it. I need your help and desperately. But I’m in no position to demand it after everything what you came through because of my weakness. And I won’t be blaming you for refusal. Being in your position I would surely refuse. No, I’m not threatening you, I’m only being honest about my future. And you will do what you want with this knowledge. After a few days you may be on Argossyne again. I won’t stand in your way.”

“You’re not making it easy, master,” Vien noticed, reciprocating his gaze.

“Maybe because I, personally, don’t value things that come too easy. I dared to hope it’s the same with you.”

Vivianne smiled this time. “You never stop trying, don’t you? Is it true you killed Garmin by your own hand for what he had done to us?”

“No exactly with the hand,” he shrugged. “I was using the knife, the one I have shown you once.”

“Rhea mentioned it. Is it really that satisfying to cut the man in restraints, even most evil one?”

“So she hasn’t told you the whole story. He wasn’t in restraints while dying.”

“Drugged then?” Vien asked intrigued.

“Sweet infinity, no!” Artri sounded offended.

“Where would be the fun in it? I have let him heal after the torture, to regain lost weight and to exercise. After that Garmie got the knife, exactly like mine, and has been told if he will win in the duel, killing me, my friends will let him go free.”

“And he agreed?”

“Poor idiot had no choice, but he was willing.”

“And were you not afraid he can really do that?”

“What? Killing me? No way, such a greenhorn stood no chance. I was just playing with him.” Artri said matter-of-factly. “And even if, by some strange turn of fortune, he could win, there was regeneration apparatus ready. It wasn’t necessary.”

“Of course!” Vien smirked. “But don’t tell me, master, you came out unscathed.”
“No, these knives are bloody sharp. Especially one such cut across the ribs. I was bleeding profusely and still there’s the scar.”

“How come I haven’t seen it when we were fucking?”

“Making love sounds much better but nevermind. It’s probably because you had your eyes closed, mostly, your Goddess only knows why. I can show you now if you wish.”

Vien blushed a little. So he remembered.
“Why not, will you let me check if you’re not lying?” She stood up and approached the man.

The scientist pulled off his shirt. And there it was. Long and pinkish white. Vien bowed a little to touch it with the tips of her fingers and then she saw something else.
“What is it, master?” She gasped.

“What do you mean, Squirrel?” He asked nonchalantly.

“Natti, your back!” she exclaimed.

“What with it?” His voice was far softer than before. “It’s nothing you should trouble that pretty head of yours.” Artri reached for his shirt but Vien wasn’t that easy to dismiss when she didn’t want to be.

“Who has done this to you?” She inquired eyeing the multitude of welts and marks. Some already healed or healing but some fresh, most probably not older than a few days.

“Darling, it’s nothing,” he tried again.

“Who is doing this to you, just tell me!”

“Are you jealous? Believe me, I’m not that type!”

“It’s not funny. What a sick bastard could agree to that, instead of sending you to the doctor?”

“Believe me, my doctor knows about it. He allows it when necessary. Sometimes there’s no other way to contain all that pressure. Especially in the times like these. I’m usually asking Fisher. And now, are you happy?”

Artri has raised his green eyes toward her and in that moment Vien suddenly had realised how close she was to the man, their chests almost touching. She blushed and stepped back.

“I’m sorry,” he said, putting on the shirt again. “It wasn’t meant for you to see. I planned to regenerate them before you’ll admit me to your bed. If I would be that lucky.”

Vien looked at Artri Kennert from the safe distance of her armchair realizing she doesn’t know him at all.
Even if Vien felt much better now, she was still getting tired fairly easy. Traumatic events on Galdanede were fresh and painful in her memory. She returned to her comfortable bed soon after dinner. Artri himself suggested it to her. He said they have time enough. No need to rush things, her health is most important. She could not say it wasn’t nice to be cared for.

Instead of sleeping the girl couldn’t stop thinking what a strange mixture of awful and endearing, dangerous and soft, Artri Kennert is. Such a perfect challenge for any skilled and determined woman. The woman, yes. Much less for the girl. She sighed. She wanted to go. But somehow thinking about departing was making her uncomfortable. It would be like the escape from important duty, neglecting the place that needed her more than any on Argossyne.

Once again the sleep was impossible. Vien put on the dressing gown and took the walk through the garden.

While in the corridor leading outdoors, she has heard indisputably female voice. There weren’t any women beside her in the house when she and the scientist arrived. Vivianne hurried to check if the hearing isn’t deceiving her. It wasn’t. Together with the black-maned stood tall, golden-haired beauty.

“What are you doing here, kid?” It was the male who spotted Vien first. “I supposed you to be sleeping.”

Vivianne ignored him completely, running straight into the open arms of Sara Cornelia Branson. Sally’s embrace was soft and comforting. Vien didn’t want to part with her friend but she had to. Inviting Sara to Perennis was another demonstration of good will from Artri’s side. It was that or the next element of the elaborate manipulation. Whatever the intension the other woman’s presence was an undisputable fact.

When Vien stepped back a little she saw Artri looking at their bonding with an indulgent smile, with the hint of melancholy. The man was leaning against the wall. He rolled the sleeves of his green shirt up, accentuating the informal nature of the meeting.

“I planned it as a surprise for you, when you’ll wake up,” the physicist said. “I’m afraid it won’t be anymore. So I have to leave you now. Apparently you both have much to talk about.”

Before the master of the house could leave heading to his personal chambers Vien jumped spontaneously to hug him too. It was made out of sheer gratefulness for the joy he caused her.

“It’s okay,” the male said putting his hands on Vivianne’s waist for a few short seconds. Not to bring her closer but to keep some distance between them. “I guess you may need friendly advice I’m unable to provide,” he added, stepping aside. “I won’t be disturbing you anymore today. Let’s meet at the breakfast. Good night, girls.”

He was gone so quickly Vien had no chance to comment or react to it.

“Well,” Sara said, “I’m so, so happy to see you in one piece.”


“Run!” Sally said as soon as they reached Vivianne’s apartments.

“What?” Vien looked at the other woman disbelievingly.

“Exactly what I have said. Artri told me, he’s offering you, among other alternatives, freedom. It’s hard to tell if he’s honest with us but you have nothing to lose. Check it, and if it’s true, use it. Trust me, It’s not the world for any Argossynian girl.”

“Wait, let’s sit and you can say it all again.” Vien felt a little overwhelmed by the sudden outburst of her friend.

“I’ve said, run, if you can. It’s not the place for any Argossynian.” Sara was holding Vivianne’s hands in hers while repeating her advice.

“But you, you seem so well adapted. And Anabelle is thriving,” Vien immediately objected.

“It’s because we are in love with our men and it gives us motivation to live here with them. They are both unfaithful, erratic playboys but we accept them, as they are, because these boys just cannot be different. Besides, I have my work and other occasional lovers and Belle her popularity in high society of Galdanede. There’s nothing for you like that, only loveless relationship with the dominant male and trying pregnancy every other year if you would be lucky. It may be every single year. You really want to end as the womb of his family? And don’t be mistaken, you cannot be his mistress again. He may call you that at home but you will be just another servant. Most miserable of them all because most dependent on his goodwill especially when in your vulnerable state.”

“I know you want only my well-being but if it’s exactly how you pictured it, why he asks me to make the final decision?” Vien was suddenly sceptical.

“Don’t be silly. He wants your ‘yes’ only to tell you later you wanted it all by yourself. Our coordinator is a first grade manipulator, such naive girl stands no chance with him. Don’t do this. Don’t give him that power. Save yourself while you can.”

“I thank you for your honest opinion,” Vien said carefully. “But in that case… Artri probably could predict what your advice will be and yet he invited you here. Can you explain this perhaps?”

Sally’s smile was strained.

“As I said, he’s the first grade manipulator. Maybe I’m the part of his manipulation not knowing about that. Who knows what can be born in that sick brain of his and what kind of game he’s playing.”

“And what if he’s not playing for once?”

“Of course, he is. Don’t be silly. Psychopaths don’t change. Least of all out of love, but I seriously doubt he’s capable of such feeling toward anyone else but himself. Well, you know what? I have an idea. If you want to know he really cares about you, as the person, not his possession, just ask him to move with you to Double X and see what Artri would say.”

“It’s ridiculous,” Vien huffed. “And silly. He won’t agree.”

“See,” Sally pointed triumphantly. “It’s because he wants you but only on his own terms and conditions. You really want to stay with someone like that?”
“I haven’t told you what I wanted. I don’t know what to do…”

“So maybe just ask the brat tomorrow,” Sally suggested. “Even if Artri won’t agree, you can read much from his reaction. And this may help you with your decision. You will know more about on what ground you stand.”

“I... I’ll think about it,” Vien promised, “it will be good to sleep with that.”
Beast of Honor

“Is it time for breakfast already?” Kennert asked, seeing Vien early in the morning the next day. Apparently Artri didn’t expect to meet the girl at that hour. He tied the luxurious mane behind and there was no trace of makeup on the man’s not very joyous face.

“I guess not. At least I’m not hungry yet and Sara is still sleeping.” Vien was nervous. Soon she will know how honest the scientist was with her before.

“What happened, Squirrel?” Artri had to notice something is not entirely right with the girl. “Have you any row with Sara, perhaps?” He inquired. “I thought she will be of help but our female genius of the friend can annoy sometimes. Please, come and tell me. I didn’t want to stress you out more than you already were…”

“Are you both acting in collusion?” Vien blurted, unable to hide her agitation any longer.

“What do you mean? In collusion with Sara? Me?” Artri sounded genuinely surprised. “I’m her archenemy if you didn’t notice. We are only reluctant coworkers, nothing more. What is between us looks more like a ceasefire than anything else. When I was punishing you she resigned and only lately joined our group again.”

“So why have you invited her here knowing full well she will be against you? What kind of perverted intrigue is this?”

“I don’t understand what you mean,” Artri answered calmly. “I wanted someone who could support you, to lessen the disproportion between our position by their presence. And for you, not to feel like a besieged fortress, but make you calmer and more relaxed. There’s no hidden agenda in this move, I swear.”

“I don’t believe you!” She clenched her fists.

“You have every right not to. But you can always test me. It seems, you came here with something particular to tell, but accused me of playing dirty instead. I’m not playing. Maybe it’s hard to comprehend but I genuinely want to know what you think. So, what it was?”

Vien was standing for the long while in complete silence before she spoke. “Do you really want me to be happy?” She asked with a determined look in her eyes.

“Haven’t I made myself clear enough?” the man answered with his own question.

“Okay,” Vien nodded. “And you will do anything in your might to make me forgive your hurting me?”

“I will. What is it you want? To kill someone for you? To blow something or… What is it? Just tell me.”

His smile, because the fiend was smiling, was dangerously close to smirk.

“There’s nothing funny in it. It’s a serious thing,” she fumed.

“Of course, it is,” the physicist agreed easily. “So don’t keep your slave in uncertainty any longer. Just tell me already, please.”

Vivianne took a deep breath and said.
“If you really love me, save me from the slavery and life in a constant dependence.”

“So you want to leave, that was predictable,” he sighed heavily, all subtle signs of mirth in his demeanour disappearing without the trace.

“So, do you agree?” She blinked disbelievingly.

“As I promised,” he nodded. “I should see it coming. Well, you can come back to your friend. I’ll start soon to prepare your Argossynian return.”

“Wait, I haven’t finished yet,” she stopped the male half step. “Because I want you to go with me!”

She winced when Artri embraced her spontaneously but the man could not see it. “Thank you, darling, you can’t imagine how happy you made me today! I wanted to propose exactly this as the third alternative but gave up not even trying. I’m such a coward with us.”

Suddenly the scientist had to realise he misused his dominance one more time and released her immediately.

“I’m sorry,” he said, “for making you uncomfortable. It’s just too easy to forget oneself when you hear most desirable words from such tempting lips. So, do you really want to take me with you?”
Vien was not prepared for this. It was much too easy. It had to be the trap. How come he was ready without the trace of hesitation to change his life and social standing. From the respected member of his world’s ruling class, powerful and influential to the lowest citizen of Double X? Is he really ready to do this for Vien? It was incomprehensible at best, impossible at worst.

“What is it?” her unusual silence soon provoked the response from the man.
“You don’t believe me, right? You probably think I have accepted your proposal to lure you to my bed. No, sweetie, I won’t touch you until we’ll be settled safely on that small globe of yours. And I can only hope you aren’t playing with me.”

“No, I’m not.” Vien found her voice at last. “I didn’t expect to get the positive answer that quickly. You need not think more about it?”

That smirk was here again. “I have failed with all my advances to win the girl I want. Maybe in different circumstances there will be a better chance to make her fully mine.”

The way it was said made Vivianne almost giddy. She blamed it on her constant lack of proper sleep. Only after some time she realised Artri is talking to her again.

“Sweetling, are you listening?” Artri asked, perhaps a bit worried by her sudden absentmindedness.

“Yes,” she nodded mechanically. “That is... I mean… can you repeat it, please.”

“I have just said you have to compose another message to your sister. We cannot appear out of the sudden at her threshold together. They must know we intend to come and accept my presence on Argossyne. Last time I was asking Rhea told me I was for them persona non grata and firmly refused to agree. Hopefully, your intervention will be enough to change their mind.”

“You… asked them... to let you stay?” Vien opened her eyes wider. It was the morning of surprises.

“I know, it was silly,” Artri sighed. “But I was just desperate. I was seriously worried the fact you were once my slave will make you the target for both the enemies and false friends of mine. I suspected you won’t be protected well enough to be safe. They didn’t want to listen but who could blame them?”

“But it happened you were right. It may be the argument we need,” Vien said animated. It was happening. She could both be free and keep her lover while not being his slave. The situation she could never imagine before seemed now close at hand. She needs bodyguard and Artri children with her. The latter may grow in a healthy environment, close to her own family. Instead of that awful Varian they’ll be meeting their wonderful aunt and her partner. Vien could not stop dreaming. She didn’t feel that positively agitated since Goddess knows how long.

Before Sally woke up the new message was ready. It was sent the same day.
“Dear Iven. The message I received from you lately was a great surprise. I’m very grateful for Mr. Kennert to offering you freedom and the will to accompany you. But although there’s nothing I’d love more than to welcome you back home, I feel very sad to refuse the entrance for your companion. Believe me, darling, I would like to admit him to our space, especially when you seem to want it so very much, but unfortunately I’m not the only one to decide. He’s too well known a person and we can’t be accused of kidnapping the famous Galdanedian scientist lest someone discovers his presence among us. Besides, after Wotan Sawter betrayal we can’t risk another case like that. I’m sorry to disappoint you. Please come back to us but do it alone. Hopefully, your partner won’t be keeping you against your will…”

Vien could not listen any longer to her otherwise beloved sister’s speech. It felt like a stab in the back from the person she always trusted the most.

“Don’t blame her,” Sally whispered. “She can’t stand against the rest of the elders.”

“I know,” Vien blinked the tears. “But it hurts no less. We were making various strategical plans already. What am I to do now?” Vien was devastated. Sara embraced her.

“Why are they like this? He wanted to sacrifice almost everything for me…”

“Easy, easy, it’s possible Artri expected what the possible answer will be and hoped he could use it to gain your trust eventually.” Sally apparently wanted to warn her but Vivianne didn’t want to listen anymore.

“I don’t care!” she exclaimed stubbornly. “I know if I’ll return they won’t trust me at all. I will be like a leper for them after pleading for the male from Galdanede. I have seen such cases already and many. It will be better for everyone if I’ll stay here.”

“Don’t be silly,” Sara was unrelenting. “Now I feel guilty for awakening your unreasonable hopes. I should know better and not let him outsmart me. But how would I know the brat may use me not even knowing what I will say!”

Lured by their raised voices, the master of the house soon appeared. “What is this commotion, girls? Are you quarrelling again?” The man asked measuring them with his green stare.

“They denied you the entrance,” Vivianne said with the sad look on her face.

“Well, it was fairly predictable,” Artri admitted coming closer. “But don’t worry, Squirrel. We will send you as first and I will join you sometime later. Surely I’m able to find the way to make it.”

“No.” Vien exclaimed, exasperated.

“What does that mean? You don’t want me after all?”

“She’s just tired,” the golden-haired woman tried to intervene. “You can discuss all this later. Tomorrow morning perhaps.”

“Let her say it,” Artri insisted, ignoring Sally’s clumsy efforts to stop him. “She’s conscious adult and can speak for herself. Can you, darling? Or am I to wait for the explanation til tomorrow morning as our friend suggests?”
“There’s no need, my lord.” Vien raised her head proudly. “I’ll rather stay with you. If you only let me, I will be the safest here.”

“You cannot do this!” Sara was furious.

“I can’t do what?” Artri didn’t look surprised by his co-worker’s outburst. They were shut together in the coordinator’s cabinet and Sally desperately tried to amend what she herself unwittingly helped to unleash.

“Please, don’t pretend that wide-eyed innocence again,” beautiful woman groaned. “We both know you aren’t such a man. If you honestly care about that poor girl’s well-being you should let her go, as promised.” Her violet eyes were pleading now.

“But I let her go, Sally,” the black-maned smiled this time, unmoved. “It’s not my fault Vien doesn’t want it anymore. It surprised me too what she said today.”

“Stop it. Just stop it!” The woman could barely stand it. “It’s untoward to use that child’s temporary weakness against her best interests. If by some miracle she trusts you now, please, don’t abuse that trust!”

“Believe me, I have her best interests in mind. What do you want me to do now, to satisfy your obsession? Must I knock Vivianne unconscious, pack her to my Argo and transport the girl against her will to the border of The Double X Zone? She was already there, on her own, and look how it ended. They failed to protect her. Not once, but two times already. I won’t let them make the same mistake again. She’s far too precious to roam free and unguarded like before.”

“You won’t let them? You fiend, you monster! Who do you think you are?”

“The best man for the job, I guess?” Artri looked at her with an impenetrable stare.
Errands to run

Artri Kennert was indisputably the happiest man in the whole Galdanedian System. His beloved just said yes. And not tentatively but with full conviction. It was as unexpected as it was wonderful. Artri told Vien she can always change her decision if she ever feels like it. Not pushing the girl too much was vital to his lasting success with her. But there were many things, waiting to be done, and even if it was most pleasant duty, it demanded leaving Vien on Perennis, at least for some time. Luckily there was Sara to keep her company. Artri was not afraid anymore Sally could set the girl against him. She tried it already but with no success and was far too wise to not see it was fruitless.

Artri himself could not say what made Vien change her mind that abruptly. Young woman was so set on returning until suddenly she wasn’t. Artri wasn’t eager to inquire too deeply, for the wonder not to dissipate in the harsh light of day. He knew the decision has nothing in common with love. It’s exactly what kept Vien more or less loyal before - hope for helping the others and neutralising Art as a potential threat. Now Vivianne was ready to admit she’s in serious need of protection after the circle of their enemies has multiplied. This, and she was deeply moved after seeing the aftermath of the therapy, Artri used to apply for himself, with indispensable help of Tommy. It was priceless to hear the girl calling Fisher sick bastard for indulging his friend with the whip. Artri could not stop giggling when reminding himself her reaction.

The potential was there and Artri would do everything in his might to not waste it. It meant some important errands to run before he will feel entitled enough to consummate the sweetest fruits of their renewed relationship.

The girls were sitting in the garden. Vivianne has just returned to her original hair colour and the physicist could not get enough of most precious view. Especially now when the sunbeams filtering through the leaves were caressing her fallow head. It should be his fingers.

“What is it, master?” Vivianne noticed the silent presence of the scientist. Sara raised her head too and before Artri had the chance to respond the blond spoke first.

“Apparently our sweet coordinator decided to back out of his the way to the beauty contest for the while, to visit us, humble slave girls.”

“You are anything but humble, Sara,” Artri laughed. “And no, it’s nothing as frivolous as that. I have to sort out some important issues and unfortunately it demands my personal visit to Galdanede. It may last a few days so I came to say my formal farewell before the departure.”

Vivianne apparently was extremely surprised and, it seemed to the scientist, a little upset by his statement.
She stood up and came closer.
“I wouldn’t mind to go with you if you would want me to,” she offered unexpectedly.

“I’m unspeakably grateful for your magnanimous proposition, my sweet lady,” Art sent her apologetic smile, “but I may be busy the whole days.”

“And nights also?” Vien tilted her head playfully. It was the girl’s first such explicit allusion to their, still nonexistent, sex life. If they were talking about it at all, it was almost always in the context of their perspective, shared parenthood. It was almost sinful to ignore her plain eagerness but Artri
had to as the part of his long-range strategy. It was hard but it will pay off.

“I’m sorry,” he said, “but I’m afraid it may come to that.”

“Oh, really,” the girl seemed to look at him suspiciously. “The whole nights?”

“Surely not, but I have to sleep. Well, at least sometimes. As for you it would be better to heal completely before you will assume certain responsibilities.” Artri cringed internally for how stiff and flat it sounded. He was losing his wits with alarming tempo. But it was easy near that person.

“I could stay at the Cycads Valley, master,” it looked like she didn’t give up yet.

“Sorry but the Cycads Valley mansion is for sale,” Artri informed her. “I plan to sell it as the place being the witness to my ultimate dishonour. Surely you wouldn’t want us to keep it after all your undeserved suffering, which took place in its underbelly?”

Even listening about it had to be painful for the young woman, but Vivianne showed no signs of the distress.

“I cannot blame the walls for what took place between them,” she stated with almost unnatural calm. “But you will do whatever you want, my lord. I wish you swift and pleasant journey.” She curtsied and turned to rejoin Sara under the bower.

Despite superficial niceties she had shown him there was no doubt Artri has been actually dismissed.
“Why the hell did you get me here, Artri?” Varian Daniel Kennert was lately in a very poor mood and didn’t plan to hide it. Especially after the scientist demanded to talk to him one on one, not caring to ask if Vari has time for him or no. But Artri was usually like that. That boy had an unpleasant habit of shoving people around, his very own parent included.

“It’s nice to see you too, father,” the physicist smirked. “Come on! You aren’t able to spare a few hours for your only child and do it without the incessant moaning?”

In that moment Vari suddenly looked up at Art as if seeing him for the first time today. And kept his gaze for the long while. He could not miss a palpable change in his beloved son’s demeanour and the man’s overall appearance.

Artri looked not only differently but infinitely better than the last time they met. It was a few weeks ago and Vari had a strong suspicion Tommy Fisher was overindulging him with Artri’s favourite cure. Varian did not understand how it was possible his son needed severe pain so much, at least in certain circumstances. And it pained him enormously this time it was all because of that skinny little slut, Artie had to leave among her equally whorish compatriots. Vari could only hope someone eventually will slit pathetic bitch’s throat. With the wench as shamelessly promiscuous as she Vivianne should find her nemesis fairly soon. If she hasn’t already found them that is.

Vari stopped dreaming and turned toward his son once more.

“You look fantastic today, Artie,” he said. “To what miracle we owe such glorious change? Did you kill someone perhaps?”

“No.” Came very quick answer. “Actually, not yet. But I may plan something.” Artri admitted with a predatory smile.

“You know it’s dangerous lest anyone discovers your unusual hobby.” Vari reminded him both out of habit and parental duty.

“I’m acutely aware, dear Vari. And equally careful. Don’t worry, old man. But I’m here not to discuss such pleasant activities. There’s a serious problem I need to talk about.”

“Seems to me, Artie, you aren’t exactly in a businesslike mood. Is it possible my son has found at last that proper person to cheer him up?” Vari inquired further. “Because if not that other thing it had to be something, for sure.”

“Perhaps I did,” the physicist smiled. “Perhaps I did.”

“Good. Because I have almost lost my long cherished hope for grandchildren. Years pass and we have like what? Single miscarriage.” Vari snorted.

“Don’t worry, father. I’m working on it. Or soon will be.” Artri looked him in the eyes. “And this is where I need your involvement.”

“Involvement? What do you mean?” Vari felt more than a little stupefied.

Artri moved long ringed fingers through his glorious, shining black hair and explained. “You see Vari, when I will have the children I want them to be carried and be born of my rightful mistress. Not some ordinary slave, the concubine or a casual bedwarmer. The chosen one.
“Cherished. Respected.”

“Okay,” Vari agreed. “That’s always most preferable arrangement. For your shared offspring to respect their mother when they will grow up. But I still don’t understand…”

“I’ll soon get there. For me it’s not just preferable but sine qua non condition. And the girl I have in mind was not a virgin when I met her. Even if she’s very young, she has a rather sad story to tell about her sadistic and unjust owner. The man wasn’t able to recognise what a jewel he got and hurt her enormously, delivering cruelest punishment for the crimes she wasn’t guilty of. But she’s pure angel of a forgiving kind and is willing to take the chance despite the scars her soul is to wear for the rest of her precious life.”

“You mean that Riadisan girl you saved from Bernet Haldane?” Vari interfered. “It’s not the problem for me. You can make her your mistress, I won’t object. At least she has proved her fertility with her previous wielder, and even if her children with him were dying, it was from the lack of proper medical help. I guess she can bear you a few healthy brats without big difficulty.”

“No Vari, I’m not talking about Rissa,” Artri shook his head. “She’s sweet and a good girl but for me Rissie is more like the daughter, I wouldn’t be able to make her my lover. Young woman I have in mind was already admitted to our family. She was dutifully and successfully presented as my living property but soon after was degraded for the wrongdoings she hasn’t committed. Now I need her to be rehabilitated and cleared for assuming her previous role in my household.”

“You cannot possibly mean…” Varian moaned. “Surely you’re not serious. It must be some elaborate prank of yours. You so love to torment me. Luckily the little whore is sitting the other side of The Great Divide and there’s no way to safely retrieve her.”

“Luckily someone did this in my stead,” Artri with one sentence crashed the rest of his father’s hopes. Varian’s worst nightmares just came true.
Chapter Summary

More of Vari being nasty.

One look at Artri and Varian knew. His son was determined. To stand against his wishes, when the scientist was in that mood, proved to be the dangerous feat. Vari was far from coward but was it worth fighting for and losing his child in the process? Surely not.

One day that awful female will meet her ultimate end. If it will be while birthing his grandsons the better. He reminded himself her relatively narrow hips and small, even if shapely, ass. Surely the wench is good for entertaining her man in bed but not necessarily for bearing him children. Hopefully, the pregnancies will exhaust her organism quickly enough for his son to lose the interest in battered creature. This and judging by the history of Artri’s relationships he wasn’t able to stay with one woman much longer than for two Galdanedian years. All Vari has to do is to survive it.

“Let’s sit, Artie,” he offered. “And what exactly do you want me to do?”

“Our family court for Vivianne,” Artri said. “I want its conclusion annulled after new informations emerged. In fact, they aren’t exactly new but I was not determined enough to clear things out. Now I must before the girl conceives for the first time.”

“For the second,” Varian corrected him. “And what are these facts I must know?”

“My girl was never guilty. That man, before I disposed of him, told me how it was done. He hit her in the back of the head to knock the victim unconscious and after doing his dirty work regenerated the bruise with fast working serum. Simple and effective. That’s why there was no trace of drugs in her bloodstream. Because there weren’t any. She was right all the time. I have punished my baby for nothing.”

“But how do you know the bastard was honest with you and not with his previous statements?” Varian let himself be sceptical. “Maybe he told you what you wanted to hear? To avoid further torment.”

“Because his previous confessions didn’t exactly make sense. Only blinded by jealousy I could believe in them. I was so fixed on blood tests it made me virtually blind for other possibilities. Those bloody Riadisans, they knew me so well.”

“Riadisans, he was from Riadis?” Varian nearly jumped hearing Artri’s revelations.

“Garmin, not exactly, but his favourite uncle was, and he enrolled him in the conspiracy to discredit their political enemies. It happened this time it was your son. And to hit me there was no better intermediate target than the woman I love. I think Haldane may be involved too but my people could not find any obvious ties connecting him to the group. He’s far too cautious to have any obvious links to illegal activities even if people like him back up such actions and encourage them from behind the scenes.”
“So, what happened to their conspiracy?”

“I have enunciated them to interplanetary police. Luckily they aren’t corrupted enough to avoid acting. They destroyed this particular cell, but it’s only a drop in the bucket. Where the one disappeared, there will be tens more until they would take certain measures to get rid of all notorious terrorists and innocent women killers.”

“Artri, you should be careful. You’re messing with very dangerous people.”

The scientist only smiled. “I know this, right?” He said. “And that’s why I must strengthen security measures and to make them impenetrable from now on. They failed me two times already and I swear there won’t be the third.”

“So,” Artri continued, “returning to the matter at hand. We won’t be repeating the whole procedure. I need you to accept and sign the protocol, which is prepared already, clearing my slave from all accusations.”

“How so?” Varian raised his head. “But it was her carelessness…”

“Please, Vari,” the physicist silenced him. “Don’t start it again. Yes, Ivvi was indisputably careless. She shouldn’t go with Garmin to his room. But she’s still so very young, naïve and hotheaded. It was me, who should protect her, knowing it may come to this. I made a grave mistake letting the girl to roam the capital alone, without the escort or supervisor. I have allowed it all to happen, I have accepted all the arrangements. I’m the only one to blame.”

“Okay, if you say so,” Vari had enough. “If it would make you happy… But next time control her better.”

“I intend to,” Artri promised after Varian signed all the documents. “My precious mistress will be the best guarded female creature in all habitable space.”
Lea

Artri was satisfied. The meeting with his father went much better than he dared to expect. The physicist was ready to leave the family he was born in if Vari would stay reluctant. He had his new last name ready just in case. It would be Ravenscroft. Nathaniel H Ravenscroft was his alias Artri used sometimes when he wanted to act incognito. Luckily it didn’t come to that. Nat Ravenscroft and Efi Milton apparently fit together.

The thought alone made him nearly sick of longing. Now when she was there, it was the torture to stay away. And yet Artri had to. Instead of inviting new candidates for his service to Perennis he preferred to meet them here. He didn’t want unchecked people anywhere near his woman before through interviewing them and analysing their past. Tommy was helping him with the task so when the boys left they were picking the best offers for further proceedings. It was just the beginning but the good start was made and Artri found more than a few capable individuals, who could make the fine addition to his current human resources. He was more after the guards, not minding violentological experience. The latter won’t be probably useful at all when their main charge through the first years will be constantly either pregnant or nursing woman.

But to make that last part of his dreams possible he needed to see Stilton for another change in his medication. It meant more tests and various medical examinations. Three days passed Artri didn’t know when. The scientist was almost ready to return to Perennis if not for the last issue on his to-do list. And for this he had to visit Spaldings in their house.

During the time of his and Vivianne’s visit to Makantara Artri placed Leandra under the tutelage of Nelly and her master. It happened the servant’s stay had to be prolonged, because of a certain set of unexpected events. After returning from his Argossynian captivity Artri has left her with them for the time being, wanting neither to dismiss the girl permanently nor to keep Lea in his immediate surroundings, when there was no mistress in his household. And now the black-maned intended to retrieve her at last to place Leandra in service of his lady as the first of Squirrel’s female companions and helpers.

It was only Rissa though, who welcomed him because Nelly was mostly bedridden in the last weeks before her approaching labour.

“Hi, pretty girl, do I know you?” Artri laughed. He didn’t let Riadisan woman to kneel before him, which she wanted to do but Artri was faster, lifting her and embracing tightly.

“Welcome, Mr Kennert, master,” brown haired female greeted him shyly. She was visibly reserved and… afraid?

“What’s wrong sweetie?” Artri asked, intrigued. “And where’s the rest of the welcoming committee?”

“The mistress is sleeping. Mr. Spalding is out. And Lee feels indisposed, I… I’m sorry. It has left only me to keep you company.”

“Well, darling, it’s not your fault. Maybe I will find the cure for her sudden illness. Can you lead me, please, to our poor Leandra?” Even if it was formulated as a request, not a direct order, Rissa wasn’t the one to say no to the man she adored. Artri followed her, looking discreetly at his lovely hostess. Lea in the absence of Vivianne wanted him to pick Riadisan woman as his next mistress and tried everything to win him over to the idea. Artri could not deny Rissa was attractive with her soft brown locks, peaches and cream complexion, full lips and all. Besides, the former womb of Bernet Haldane’s household was of sweet and
agreeable nature. Caring and feminine she would be the perfect mother to love and coddle but unfortunately much less capable when it would come to providing any discipline and female authority. And his children will need both while growing. The problem was she was too sweet and too easy. Besides even if Artri had a lot of warm feelings toward his rescue they were more fatherly than befitting a prospective lover. So no, he was not interested. Especially now, for obvious reasons.

Soon they reached their intended destination.
“Lee, please let us in,” Rissa called, “Mr. Kennert wants to talk to you!”
Even if Lea wasn’t feeling entirely well at the moment, she couldn’t refuse her nominal owner so after the while the doors opened.

The woman had to be laying in bed when they came but had enough time to rise and welcome them on her feet. She bowed before Art but spoke no word.

“Nice to see you, Leandra,” Artri had to begin.

“Mr. Kennert,” she whispered at last, not looking at him.

“Did someone change my good female friend for the android?” he asked playfully. “Because it cannot be my Lea. She was always polite and cheerful.”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Kennert,” she said. “I beg your pardon, sir, can you relieve me of my duties? Indefinitely, if you please. I don’t want to serve that woman.”
Lost, not found

She wanted him. He has rescued her after she abandoned him, leaving the man to his own devices. But he didn’t mind. Artri forgave her. More, he was in love with Vien but haven’t touched her yet without the permission and was determined to wait, until she will be comfortable enough to accept his advances. Or no.

She didn’t mind if she will be his mistress or an ordinary slave. Let them keep their titles, it is the person you want to be with, that matters. He was ready to abandon his own status without a second thought to be her personal bodyguard and companion. Most famous physicist since Walton Smith was ready to do this for her, some ordinary girl with no special skills or qualities. It was crazy and beautiful.

Yes, he has hurt her. But he was deceived by their enemies, who wanted to harm them both and whom she helped with her carelessness and lack of caution. Now she will be careful, wise and thoughtful as is befitting the slave of such a famous man. She won’t give him slightest opportunity to deliver any further punishment.

He’s dangerous, it’s true, but only for their enemies. He is not a murderer. All these accusations were undeserved rumours. Yes, he killed personally but only most evil people, volunteering as their executioner to channel his aggression, lest to not aim it toward innocent victims. For Argossynians he would be a useful ally and she will help him and will reward him with her willing young body because she has hardly anything more to give. She will learn how to act as mature and responsible partner. It will be perfect. She will see to it.

The only serious price she has to pay is her personal freedom. But what kind of freedom would she have after returning, hiding for the rest of her life under false names? Argossyne wasn’t safe for her anymore. They caught her two times, they can do it again. At least, here she will be protected from evil people wanting to hurt her for all the victims she helped to rescue. And she will provide more of such help in the future. Christine herself said she can be useful anywhere. So she will be. Here.

It all sounded so reasonable. Relationship of convenience with attractive, an influential man wasn’t the worst fate which would become the girl like her. He will love her and she will learn to love in turn one day. It cannot be that bad. Or can it?

Today her Natti will return. Today she will confirm her final decision.

“You aren’t very talkative lately,” Sara noticed her absent gaze. “Is everything all right?”

“I think it should be.” Vivianne tried to smile. “What can go wrong when you’re courted by most desirable man in XY Zone? And from now on that man will be mine.”

“Vien, my dear, you seem to mistake real life for the fairy tale.” Sara looked at her sadly. “I thought you, of all the girls I know, should be more reasonable. You’re making a grave mistake. He won’t be yours in the slightest. It’s you who would be his and literally. He won’t be your partner but your owner and your master. And you know already what he’s capable of.”

For the last two days Sally didn’t try to turn Vien aside from the path it seemed she has chosen for good. But now, when their time together that was left was shrinking with an alarming rate, she made the last attempt to warn her younger friend. Vien appreciated the sentiment, but it was too late. She cannot tell Artri now she has changed her mind. It will crush him and Vivianne promised someone to not hurt the man.
Sara looked at Vien once more but there was no hope in her violet eyes. “You have feelings for him,” she said at last. “Other than desire. I can tell. So you’re lost and I can’t help you.” The golden-haired scientist trailed off. Both women stayed silent until they reached the house.
Time to pretend

The Argo was approaching the landing pad. Elegant silhouette of small personal craft lowered itself gracefully until it touched the ground.

Artri was not alone. Together with him from the ship emerged another, golden-haired physicist.

Soon Vien was watching Sally embracing her lover and couldn’t move her gaze from the kissing pair.

“It’s the sight to behold, isn’t it?” Her master’s teasing voice broke the spell she found herself in. Artri was standing so close to Vien she could smell the well-known subtle scent of sweet flags.

“Yes, it is,” she managed, looking at the man who made her his property. In soft light of Perennian afternoon he looked more like a creature from the dreams, an Elf or some minor deity, not the living human.

And then that embodiment of beauty and grace kneeled before her kissing reverently Vivianne’s hand.

“I beg your pardon, my sweet lady,” he said looking up at her from under the black lashes. “I wanted to bring you your favourite companion but failed with the errand. Hopefully, you won’t punish your useless slave too severely for daring to return empty-handed.”

Vien was not sure what Artri means exactly. She reciprocated his gaze with as much self-assurance as she could muster and whispered.

“Stand up, my lord, before they’ll notice what you’re doing.”

“Like I care what the others think, I could easily repeat this in public,” he shrugged, unfazed. “But it’s an order from my mistress therefore her slave must obey.”

After the while he was towering over her again. She had to remind herself it’s only the game and, besides, she won’t be his true mistress ever again. Artri surprised her once more when asking for the permission to kiss her.

“Granted,” she responded, maybe a little too quickly. Vivianne expected something like the other pair was doing but the kiss was chaste. His lips barely touched her cheek somewhere near the left ear and it was all.

Maybe Vien would be bold enough to ask for more but before she could resolve to do so, Sally and her fiance approached them, holding hands.

Vien wanted to greet formally the deputy of her owner but reminded herself they were on more familiar terms than that. It was Fisher who spoke first.

“Hello, it’s so nice to meet you again,” he said. “My friend wasn’t lying when telling me you look even more enchanting than before.”

“I thank you, Tommy, for your compliment but surely you’re much too kind for the humble creature like me,” she smiled to him.

“And you are much too modest for the first ever female being, who could take my insufferable friend on her leash. Don’t you think? You’re pretty and brave. It’s far more than he deserves to have.”

It was Artri who responded this time.

“Did you know, Fisher, it’s untoward to woo your host’s beloved? Especially when that man is watching.” He was smiling but there was intimidation factor in his otherwise merry eyes. Tommy didn’t react to this. They were probably playing that game for years.
I’m only paying my respects for our first lady in the making. You cannot blame me for being polite to such captivating creature,” he answered with undisturbed dignity.

“And who’s insufferable now?” Artri laughed.

“Stop it, boys,” Sara firmly intervened. “You will play your favourite tug of war later. Now we’ve prepared the supper. Let’s go and you can tell us what happened in the wide Galdanedian world. And,” she added with the smirk, “what you both were doing when we weren’t able to control you.”

The meal felt awkward for Vivianne. Artri was sitting in front of her, not beside her like it could be expected. He said it was to feed his senses with her lovely sight better or some other such polite nonsense. She could recall different arrangements when they were dining with Francesca. She hated it then but now every look at the black-haired Makantaran reminded her exquisite taste of his skin and mouth and possessive holds of the man. It was too long already. She was barely listening to the others talking, distracted more and more by the view.

Artri was flirting with Sara and bantering with Tommy, sometimes the other way around. For Vien he had mostly long lasting glances but rarely any word.

When the time to sleep came their guests left them heading for the bedroom together. Sara wanted to use rare opportunity to have her owner fully to herself, which was understandable but left Vien without the support of her older colleague.

“You’re not tired?” Artri’s voice disturbed the silence.

“Why should I,” she blinked. “We were only talking and walking a little. There was nothing to make me tired.”

“That’s good.” He said. “I mean for you. I’m happy you have fully recuperated after your last ordeal. But still we have to check if everything’s all right. We cannot risk any… unpleasant events.”

“I guess not,” Vien smiled weakly. So that was it again. Fertility issues, reproductive health, not very endearing perspective of endless tests and examinations. She had got it enough even before it really started. And what if he’s just faking the feelings for her to have his perfect offspring at last? The thought was suddenly unbearable. Vivianne stood up.

“Maybe I have changed my mind,” she said barely able to hide her annoyance. “Can you walk me to my bedroom my lord?”

The scientist noticed the abrupt change in her demeanour. “What have I done to make you angry?”

“Nothing. I have changed my mind is all.” She repeated stubbornly.

“So it’s true. “Okay,” he said in placative manner. “For me it’s even better because my last days were impossibly hectic so I couldn’t get much sleep. Tomorrow morning I’ll tell you everything about what I handled.”

She agreed to that because what else she could do.

At the doors to the room Artri kissed her hand once more and waited until she disappeared behind them.
The Thaw

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The next day Sara and Tommy left for Galdanede on Argo which was to be re-sent on autopilot after they will reach their destination. Vien had to stay with Artri alone for Goddess knows how long to discuss the details of their future life.

She was sick of talking and endless discussions but Artri said it’s for her comfort and safety, for him to know in advance, what she will require. Like it wasn’t in his might to render null and void anything on what they would agree. But Vien couldn’t tell him that, so she had to endure the whole thing, dangerously close to interrogation. And of those she had enough already.

At last Artri noticed her reluctance. “If you’re not ready yet,” he said, “I’ll give you more time to think...”

“I do not need the time,” Vien stressed, interrupting him.

“So where’s the problem?” Somehow famous, award-winning scientist wasn’t able to sense the mood of his young interlocutor.

“The problem is, if you really love me and respect me as a distinct person, not just the means to an end, we..., I need no elaborate agreements. If you don’t, no amount of signed pages will guarantee I will not be hurt even more severely than before or, the worse, won’t be killed one day.”

Her bone deep honesty shocked Artri. “Killed? What are you…?”

know what I’m saying. I have the right to be afraid after all that happened.” Vien sighed. It was painful to recall the horror she went through. She could forgive but will never forget.

“Oh, so what is it you want?” Emerald gaze was serious and expectant.

“Only a few things, really. Always listen to me, not to my accusers. Never leave me unless I’ll ask you to. I also need equal voice in the way of raising our children and one more thing. You know I’m taking an enormous risk, giving my whole self in a bargain. And I have every right to be terrified by my choice. I resolved to stay with you, for the greater good and few other reasons, but I’m only inexperienced, silly girl and it may be the situation will outgrow me and life as a slave will become unbearable. Can you promise me, if I, one day, will realize it was a mistake, you will let me go, even with a child or children?”

Artri was silent for the long time and Vien worried but the man answered at last. “The first three are obvious and easy. But the fourth condition surely is the tough one. I have to think about it.”

“I understand.” Vien nodded. “It’s not decision one can take lightly. I can only a promise from my side I intend to use it only as my last resort. If I’ll ever ask for the favour like that, it would mean I’m utterly desperate.”

Artri came to her after a few hours. It had to be the good sign. Whatever decision he made he had to think the things throughly.

“Viv, I don’t know what you will say to it. I’m sorry but I can’t agree to the children part. Only you and one kid of your choosing. Unless you will get me the permission for moving to Argossynian System with our whole family. Maybe as the father of your sister’s nephews I’ll have a much better
chance than the last time. If such would be your will we don’t even need to live together. I only want to protect you and see you all from time to time. Is this acceptable arrangement?”

Vien well knew how difficult his situation was. It wasn’t easy for the man like him to accept most of her condition, and yet he expressed the will to cooperate, even knowing the compromise he proposed, can be firmly rejected. However, the realistic approach was far better than any hasty promises.

To not keep him in uncertainty any longer, she said. “I thank you, my lord, for your admirable honesty. I think I can agree to such a deal.”
Vien extended her hand to him, which Artri squeezed with visible relief.
“Besides,” Vien added to comfort her master, “I seriously hope it will never come to this. It’s only additional insurance.”

That evening they parted exactly like yesterday.

“Ivvi?” Artri raised his gaze toward the young woman, standing at his threshold. Her shapely body was covered only with a loosely tied dressing gown and the girl was barefoot. “You cannot sleep?”
“I wasn’t sleeping, master,” she said. It sounded somehow less formal than usual.
“I have been taking the bath.”
“I see. And?”
Vivianne came closer. In fact, that close Artri could sense the warmth of her body and delicate natural scent. She surely was not straight from the tub. The girl had to play with herself for some time after.
“You came here to tease me more?” He asked fighting with prevalent urge to touch her.
“No, I’m not as cruel as you, my lord.” That said, she untied the sash. Her skin was flushed under thin clothes.
“It’s so hot here.” She whispered throwing off the dressing gown completely.
“And, surely,” she added, while making herself comfortable on his lap, “we cannot have children, you so crave for, keeping separate beds for ever.”

Chapter End Notes

Accidentally The Thaw is the song by the Biffy Clyro. It's starts as that:

"Tonight we're gonna share the same space
To see what will become of it
Forgive me if my mouth is dry
I'll blame it on my battle cry"

Lyrics by Simon Neil, who, by the way could be quite suitable model for Artri Kennert. If only his nose would be a little longer...
Garden talk

When Artri woke up the next morning Vivianne was nowhere to be seen. The situation evoked unpleasant feelings. The physicist had to tell himself she wouldn’t be able to escape anywhere far without the ship. Besides, they well guarded the place. He was just paranoid.

At last he found the girl, sitting in front of the house. Vien was eating the big breakfast. She was wearing a short shoulder strap dress of an intense red colour. It was her only article of clothing. Barefoot and with her long fawn hair hanging loose young woman looked so fresh and delectable Artri could eat her alive.

When the girl noticed scientist’s presence stood up to kiss and hug him but quickly slipped from his embrace returning to the interrupted meal.

“I’m sorry for leaving that way but I was starving. Hopefully, you’re not angry with me for seeking something to eat,” she said and then added as the afterthought. “You want some?”

“I’ll just bring myself something to drink,” Artri said enchanted by the vibrant presence of an amazing young creature.

How could he survive without her for so long? It was the greatest enigma. But now she was there and will stay. Every day and night. He remembered vividly details of their belated reunion sex. Vien started it cocky with her clever entrance but, as soon as she realised Artri is more than interested, the girl immediately switched to perfectly submissive attitude, letting him to take the whole initiative. Vivianne despite of her versatility preferred such an arrangement but only when she could put her trust safely in her chosen partner and truly respect him. It was the great responsibility to bear that trust and not betray it.

Falling for her was easy. It was also easy to forget she could perfectly separate her purely physiological needs from higher feelings. She was doing exactly that for most of their relationship and this time probably was not different. And yet he couldn’t part with a faint but persistent hope she can be his one day as the whole.

“Don’t worry that much,” Vien said seeing him frowning, “I’m sure we can make it.”

It was unbelievable how in a few days the girl moved from suspecting him of planning to kill her to that cheerful openness and almost complete acceptance.

“If you say so I’m more than willing to believe,” Artri smiled to her. “You’re an angel.”

“No,” Vivianne shook her head vigorously. “Surely I’m not one. Angels weren’t supposed to… ew, you know…” The girl succumbed to uncontrollable bout of laughter.

After some time, she apparently figured out such frivolous behavior does not become the newly minted slave of a very important man. She somehow regained her control but, apparently, achieved it with great difficulty.

“I’m sorry,” she said apologetically. “I’m not always like that. I swear I can act like a mature person.”

“It’s okay.” Artri smiled again. “I don’t want to repeat my old mistakes and stifle by force your natural vibrancy and liveliness. You are young and therefore deserve every opportunity to behave like young persons use to.”

“My sweet Goddess, master. You sound like some two centuries old man. At best!” she giggled again. “Are you going to tell me you’re older than Mr. Salter himself?”
This time Artri couldn’t fight the urge to laugh too. “No, certainty not. Even Vari is less than half as old as he it seems. I never asked Perry about the date of his birth. But speaking of which. When you’ll be ready to begin your necessary examinations?”

Hearing this Vien sagged visibly. “Natti,” she groaned, “can’t we enjoy ourselves a little before we start anything? Just a few months. I don’t know if I’m ready yet. Can we? Master, please.”

It was impossible to deny her anything. So Artri only shrugged. “Of course,” he said. “Why not? In the meantime we can pick girls to keep you company when I’ll be absent, and for helping you with children later. Surely you would like to choose your compatriots for the job like this?”

“Oh,” Vivianne looked surprised. “So she likes Riss more than me. But it’s her life, and she has every right to choose what she sees as a more desirable alternative. But I would never tell…”

Artri had no heart to reveal before her the real reason behind Lea’s absence.
Back in high society

Weeks passed like in the haze. The second honeymoon was far more joyful and satisfying than the first one. It put Vivianne’s fears to the deep sleep.

After they had enough of their intimate activities in almost every corner and surface of Perennian estate Artri took her back to Galdanede. He said it was vital to show Vien to the wider audience as fully rehabilitated and reinstated mistress of his.

In the public he was watching people’s reactions, always ready to intervene, if anyone tried to show any kind of untoward behaviour or wasn’t civil enough when dealing with his chosen one.

Formally she was cleared of all the guilt and her fault virtually forgotten. The fact she was with all those men in Cycad’s Valley manor’s basement and elsewhere meant no harm to her reputation now, because all of it was ordered, and accepted, by Vivianne’s rightful owner. Nobody had the right to use it against her unless being ready to risk the confrontation with angry dominant male. After all similar duty could be inflicted any time, on every single slave, with no specific reason outside of the wish of their master. It wasn’t anything worthy to talk about.

Outwardly nobody dared to defy the expectations of Artri Kennert, even people not dependent on his good graces knew better than to antagonize the influential man.

Despite every measure taken to avoid any unpleasant incidents, being among people wasn’t always entirely comfortable for the young mistress. She carried herself with a great dignity, trying to ignore meaningful glances and unfriendly whispers in the background.

Artri asked her to tell him about every such an occurrence but Vien shied away from engaging him in trifling matters. She knew people will always talk, and waiting until they’ll get bored by this case, seemed to her the best strategy.

The only thing that was upsetting for her was a certain aloofness in Anabelle’s behaviour. When she and Artri visited Merrivers for the first time after Vivianne's return the blond beauty welcomed her politely but without the former cordiality.

“It’s nice to see you,” the hostess said, measuring the girl with a carefully neutral stare. The cold distance Bell had shown her chilled the slave to the bone, cooling Vivianne’s initial enthusiasm.

“It’s nice to see you too, you look as beautiful as always,” Vien managed. Before she could think what more to tell, Anabelle tried to excuse herself saying she’s busy with accommodating her master’s guests. Vien would like to let her but Kennert didn’t want to hear about it.

“What is it, sweetie?” He asked. “You surely can devote a little of your precious time to the long absent friend of yours.”

For Anabelle this suggestion was as binding as any order so happy or not she had to comply. Vien didn’t want to annoy Belle more than she already was, for whatever incomprehensible reason.

“I can take care of myself,” she tried.

“Nonsense, darling,” Artri interrupted them again. “Our beautiful hostess surely knows better than to neglect one of her most important guests, isn’t it so, Anabelle?”

Vien looked apologetically at the other woman.

“It’s okay,” Bell said extending her hand toward Vivianne. “You can help me with my task.”

It was an awkward and uncomfortable situation for them both, but luckily Sara and Tommy appeared
soon and Sally could save her from further confusion. She has stolen Vivianne for herself to interrogate her thoroughly about the last stay on Perennis and if she, Goddess forbid, needs no help. Vien sworn earnestly that she doesn’t, at all. Everything was in a perfect order. The only thing that worried her lately, she confessed at last, was Belle’s strange behaviour.

“Oh, Belle,” Sara sighed. “It will surely pass. Be patient.” She didn’t want to tell Vien anything more.

And now Vivianne was preparing herself for the birthing party at Spaldings. Usually such an event was held during the labour itself and after when the newborn could be presented to all the guests gathered for the occasion. Fortunately for Nelly Spalding was far too caring and sensitive person to stress his pregnant partner out during delivery by the huge crowd of family, friends and acquaintances waiting for the result of her struggles.

Nelly gave birth to a son only with baby’s father, her women and the doctors present and they invited the guests for the evening the day after the happy event.

Stanny has informed Artri and Vien personally they can come to the party in honour of newly born Murray Lee Spalding.

“There’s no need to be nervous,” Artri embraced her from behind. “It’s not you who would be the center of attention this time. Not yet. But I dare to hope it won’t be the whole year from now on until it would be us planning similar event. I don’t want to keep that lovely belly empty for much longer.”

Kennert released her because they had no time for anything like this just now but his words were still ringing in Vivianne’s head when they were leaving for Spalding’s house.
At Spaldings

It was the lady of the house herself who welcomed them.

“Oh my Goddess, Nelly, you’re already on your feet,” Vien could not stop from voicing her surprise.

“I’m surprised too,” Helena smiled when returning Vivianne’s enthusiastic embrace. “But sometimes such things happen. We’ve had a very hard time before, my doctor’s orders were to rest as much as I could. So after months of lazing around and doing nothing I was full of the darkest forebodings. But it went so fast, a few hours and baby was with us already. No need of cesarean, no slightest complications. I feel exhausted but more by my constant worrying before than by the event itself. Tan urges me to return to bed soon, so I have to comply, but I saw nothing wrong in welcoming my most important guests personally.”

“Congratulations, darling,” Artri embraced Nelly too and kissed her on the lips, “for your easy delivery and its glorious outcome. When we will see the little one?”

Nelly smiled apologetically. “For this you must wait until all guests arrive. We are still waiting for both Murry’s grandfathers. I’ll call Rissa to show you your room and now excuse me. I have to lay down before Stanley catches me outside of my bed. Since we conceived Murray he has become overprotective.”

“It would be very unlikely if he wasn’t, so better go, don’t make the boy nervous for no reason,” Artri said and then turned to the new-come person. It was Rissa.

The Riadisan woman curtseyed before them. “Mr. Kennert, mistress Vien,” she whispered, visibly overwhelmed by the presence of her former supporters.

Vien could not stand it. “Stop this mistress nonsense,” she exclaimed hugging the girl. Rissa was stiff in her embrace at first but soon relented and reciprocated the gesture. Artri was not that far behind. As the result Rissa blushed prettily and forgot what she had to say.

“It’s okay,” Vien said taking the other woman’s hand, “we didn’t want to make you uncomfortable. Can you lead us to our place?”

“I think I should,” Riss found her voice again. “Please, follow me.”

“See, Nelly is much more delicate than you and yet she had no trouble with fulfilling her duty. I’m sure you too won’t have any.”

As soon as they were alone again in the guest room Artri returned to his most favourite topic. It was understandable. He already had the woman he craved for so the offspring was the next logical step. It shouldn’t be surprise the man will be insistent until he will get what he wants.

“Please, darling, promise me you will undergo the tests after we return from Spaldings. Just in case, to be sure, is all. I don’t expect us to make it soon. I’m on my inhibitors so it may take time but I will be more at ease knowing you’re entirely healthy and ready.”

“Oh, I will,” she sighed. “If it would only make you happy. But now I have to change my clothes. Can you turn your back on me?”

Artri only giggled. “No, really, are you even serious?”

“I am serious, my lord!” Vien nearly spat. “I don’t plan to take another shower anytime soon. It
would be the third one today, so I better won’t let you see me naked. Don’t look at me, please.”

“Feisty, you are,” the man smirked. “And bossy. Where have you learned that? But okay, I will leave you alone for the while. I’ll come and see where my technician is. Maybe he would be more malleable than his pretty lady and will let me look at the baby before the evening.”

True to his word the man slipped from the room. Vien sat on the bed sighing heavily. After initial indulgence and easygoing behaviour the male became increasingly controlling and possessive. But it’s how he always was. Artri could tame his intrinsic tendencies to the certain extent, when he wanted, but couldn’t make them disappear. And most probably he didn’t plan to do this.
Artri returned about half an hour later and saw Vien in exactly the same dress.

“What is it, you’re not ready yet?” He asked. What she could tell him? The silence lasted a little too long.

“Little Squirrel,” this time it was him who sighed, “is it because of what I have told you? I’m sorry but I’m restless and forget easily my sweet girl haven’t been waiting as long as me… I didn’t mean to upset you. You know I want you to be happy.”

Wasn’t he endearing like that? Like a naughty little boy who tried very hard but spoiled something again because he’s just like that and cannot be different.

“Come, let me comfort you a little. Just take it off and sit on my lap. I’ll make it good for you.” Artri’s smile was enticing. Vien was loved and desired. Why was she reluctant?

“I thank you for your kind intentions but we can’t,” she said. “Everybody will notice!”

“Since when are you that prudish?” The physicist was clearly amused. “I would think you’d like them to know. Besides nobody’s here is innocent with the only exception of the baby boy himself. But he surely won’t make any fuss about the fact one of his guests had been just...” Artri stopped seeing the warning look she gave him. “I know, no third shower before the night.” The man made the gesture of surrender.

Suddenly his communicator rang. “It’s Sara,” Artri informed Vien. “She has arrived and is asking about you. Better don’t keep her waiting.” He didn’t need to tell her twice. Vivianne grabbed prepared clothes and disappeared in the bathroom.

When she emerged from the room Artri was absent again. Her owner was most probably with the rest of the newcomers in the main hall. Vien followed him there.

She wasn’t mistaken. Around him was gathered the small group of Kennert’s coworkers. There was Sara, Tommy, the red-headed Kertie Dwight and young Warren “Reni” Cray.

Vien groaned inwardly seeing the last person. She never felt good in the boy's presence, only a few years older than Vivianne. His twisted sense of humour and barely disguised lustfulness never failed to make her feel uncomfortable.

Artri who could easily have wanted to kill another for similar behaviour was strangely indulgent with that man.

“It’s just how Reni is,” he told his slave when she complained for the first time. “He means nothing wrong. You should get used to it.”

Warren was valuable member of the group but she suspected it could be more than that. Artri seemed to treat him like the foster son, brilliant and prized, even if often troublesome, child. Another reason to grant the scientist his wish, giving Artri his true offspring to favour instead.

“How come,” Reni voiced his reservations loudly, “your women, dear colleagues, don’t wear their collars in the public as they should?”

“There he is, the self-proclaimed defender of an etiquette!” Sally snorted.
“Nobody told you, kid, it’s rude to instruct your elders how to treat their rightful property?” It was Kert this time, who scolded an insolent young physicist. The redhead was of similar age to Artri and Tommy but arrived without the partner and therefore could be regarded as a neutral, unbiased person.

Vien wanted to end the budding quarrel by saying her greetings but Stanley Spalding was faster. The host had to appear a little while earlier but nobody noticed his presence so far. “It was me, Reni,” he said coming closer. “I have asked my friends not to enforce this duty on their females when we will celebrate the birth of my son. Because in this house we believe women are equal and most times even better than men.”

Sara gave him the thumbs up, but it was Vien whom Tan approached as first to pay the girl his respect. The blond was not shy to kiss her hand, probably to spite Reni slightly more. It apparently worked because the young man could not stop himself from lashing back. “You can count yourself lucky, Stanny, your own proved to be the decent and obedient one but not everyone of them is worthy of their master.”

The boy wanted to add something in the same vein but Artri’s reaction was immediate. “One more word, Reni,” he spat, “and you can look for the job outside of Galdanede. Because no one would like to work with you there when you will be fired by me.”

Reni was visibly shocked hearing this statement. He didn’t expect such harsh reprimand. But even spoiled creature like him knew better than to argue with that man, so the boy swallowed his pride and spoke, far less haughtily than before. “I’m sorry, coordinator. I didn’t mean to offend anyone. It was only a general statement, nothing more.”

“General statement? Let’s pretend I believe you,” Artri smirked. “But the next time watch your tongue better. One day it may get you into serious trouble.”

Vien barely stopped the complacent smile threatening to appear on her lips. Making the man her sworn enemy wouldn’t make sense.

Sara had no such reservations. “I pity the girl you will choose someday,” she said eying him with disdain. Apparently Vivianne wasn’t the only woman who didn’t like Warren Cray’s personality.
Birthing party

Misters Rollison and Spalding arrived soon after. They were the last guests they were all waiting for. The event was about to begin.

It started with the toast in the honour of Nelly and Murray. All were standing during it and only the former was reclining in a comfortable armchair with soft pillows while Leandra was holding the baby. It ought to be Rissa, Vien thought. Lea should stand at her own side now. Vivianne had no opportunity to ask her personally about the reasons behind the maid’s surprising decision. Somehow Leandra’s so sudden and great attachment to Riss didn’t seem valuable enough explanation. It has to be something else. And Vien soon will know.

The opportunity has come after the dinner. The presents for baby and mother were given, congrats and respects too and Nelly could temporarily leave for her rooms, to feed the little one and rest. Tan went with her.

For the time being the guests were left to their own devices with Rissa and Lea serving them, whatever they wanted to drink or eat. It was the occasion Vien was waiting for.

“Can you leave it for the while?” Vien eyed intently the plate with snacks Leandra was holding. “I may want to have the word or two.”

“I have nothing to say to you, mistress Vivianne!” she spat in a theatrical whisper.

“Oh, really?” Vien tried to be calm in the face of such surprising hostility. “Please, I insist.”

“No,” came out a very short answer.

“Surely you don’t want to make the scene in the middle of family festivities,” Vien was more amused than angered by her former maidservant’s strange behaviour. “Besides, my master is watching us now. Soon he will come to see what’s happening. You want him to intervene?”

“I see you’re real menace, as always,” Lea’s face was red from indignation. “Okay, let’s go to the garden,” she offered.

“Maybe I’m mistaken but you seem to avoid me, Lee. Why’s that?” Vien inquired, trying to sound far more naïve and innocent, than she really felt. “We haven’t seen each other for the long time.”

“The audacity of yours,” Lea fumed instead of explanation. “You have no right to parade here as the rightful mistress of the man you wanted to kill.”

“How come you know about it?” Vien gave the other woman a suspicious look.

“Somehow I cannot imagine my master of all people, pouring his heart out about such matters before the servant, no matter how trustworthy.”

“No, Mr. Kennert didn’t. I… I overheard when he was talking to his colleagues. I didn’t mean to,” Lea looked a little ashamed by her own admission but soon regained previous bravery, “but it doesn’t change the fact you were the traitor to the benefactor of yours. How Mr. Kennert may still want to keep you after… all of it, is beyond me. And now, excuse me, I have my duties to attend!”

Lea didn’t run very far because at the entrance to the house she bumped into the man, they were talking about. It was typical of him. Somehow Vien haven’t been surprised at all, the scientist followed his women.

“Not so fast, maiden sweet, what is it I have asked you for?” The girl heard him saying.
She approached the pair in case Lea needed her help but Artri didn’t pay Vien any attention. 
“I have granted your wish, Lea, and you promised me to show all due respect to your mistress. Shouting at her is not something I can tolerate.”

For the short while Leandra looked like she wanted to disagree but that moment passed quickly. Long imprinted habits prevailed.

“I apologize, for my scandalous behaviour,” she said, bowing her head
“It won’t happen again, I’m sorry Mr. Kennert, mistress Vien.”
It was exactly what Vivianne didn’t want to hear but there was nothing she could do about it now.

The guests left in the late evening. Vien and Artri were ones of the few who stayed for the night.
“Nelly asked me to come to them for the while before sleep,” she informed the man.
“Are you just... asking me for the permission to go?” Artri raised his brow in mock astonishment.
“If you see it as that…,” she answered in an equally playful manner. “So, can I?”

“Do you want to hold him?” Lea asked. It was like offering the olive branch of sorts so Vien had to comply. She took the little bundle from the woman. Even at such a close distance the baby looked very tiny. The infant was sleeping, not caring one bit about all the fuss surrounding him and his mother today.

During the nursing lessons at school they taught all Argossynians how to deliver the baby and take care of the newborn. It could always happen that such knowledge would be useful for them, if being bred in captivity, or to help the others in similar circumstances.
Vien knew the basics but exercises with dolls and models were not exactly the same as dealing with living, breathing creature. Especially when the said being was beloved firstborn child of her close friends.

“He’s beautiful but so small, his eyelids are almost translucent!” Vivianne said looking at Nelly from above the dark blond head of the nursling.
Helena nodded. “Murray was such good boy not growing too big. But doctors say he’s perfectly healthy and will soon catch up. It’s my fault, I guess. You know I’m not exactly the breeding type and we don’t plan more children because of that.”

For Vien it was a novelty. But it shouldn’t surprise her. Most of XY-ers preferred one child, rarely two. It was her lover who was the exception.

It reminded her the man was probably waiting for her in the guest bedroom. She stayed a bit too long and her hosts surely needed to rest.
“It’s okay,” Nelly said when Vivianne tried to apologize. “I won’t be sleeping regardless, I was napping much during the day and soon will have to nurse again.”

As if to confirm his mother’s words little boy opened his intensely sapphire eyes and squirmed a little in Vien’s arms.
“I think you’re right,” Vivianne smiled handing the child to Nelly. “I won’t be distracting you with my presence any longer. Good night to all of you.”

Walking through the corridor Vien was thinking how lucky her friend is. She and her partner have created such a small, almost unbelievable enclave among all the hurt and suffering The XY Zone
usually was. No wonder that Nelly, despite being a new mother, felt so confident and peaceful in her role. She could trust her baby’s father unconditionally. It should not surprise Vien Lea preferred this family over uncertainty awaiting her in Kennert’s household. Besides, grandfathers visiting them were nothing like Vari, who wasn’t hiding the disdain he had for the prospective mother of his grandchildren.

When the girl entered the room Artri seemed to be already sleeping. She turned the lights off and laid down on her side trying to use as little space as possible not to wake him.
Because of her master’s insistence Vien agreed to let Percy perform at least some basic examinations for her. They summoned the medic to Perennis soon after returning from the birthing party at Spaldings. But none of them didn’t expect to hear what he said.

“Congratulations, first lady. You’re four weeks pregnant.”

“The what?” They both exclaimed almost simultaneously.

“I don’t understand how can you be that surprised?” Perry could not stop smiling. “Surely you have to know how human procreation works and to what kind of outcome having sex without protection may lead. And I guess you weren’t holding it back at all.”

“Yes, but the last time I was on exactly the same inhibitors it never ended with success…” Artri was visibly confused.

“Are you trying to imply it’s not your child?” Percy said, mockingly.

“Of course not. I should know it may happen. But why I couldn’t sense the change in her chemistry. I usually know when the girl is pregnant even before the tests may say so.”

For Vien it sounded ridiculous.

“As far as I can remember, you weren’t able to tell I was pregnant for the first time also,” she reminded him. “I guess if you knew I wouldn’t be able to escape with Caroll, you would guard me much better!”

“It’s true,” he exclaimed. “Perry, is it possible it was somehow connected with a low level of pregnancy hormones? I mean, Vien has lost our first…”

“Artri, you have no clue at all when to shut up,” Perry scolded him. “As for now everything seems to be in perfect order. There’s no need to scare the girl prematurely, isn’t it so, child?”

“I’m sorry,” Artri mumbled. “I’m a bit shocked.”

“Shocked? How old are you? Fifteen?” Perry chided. It made Vivianne laugh inordinately. Only the old medic and Sara had the guts to treat him that way.

“One of most damaging factors leading to miscarriage is the prolonged stress and lack of security. I would blame them for your first failure, not any organic matters either from the baby’s or the mother’s side. But I had no opportunity to examine either, so it’s only speculation. It wouldn’t hurt though, my boy, to ensure your partner could have both - the sense of security and lack of unnecessary stress.

As for the rest, we’ll be monitoring the situation closely. I’ll change the synthesizer programme for the proper dietary supplementation. It will put all necessary substances into whatever you will order.

“Okay,” Vien tried not to show how deeply she was touched by the news and her master’s strangely distanced behaviour. She imagined that moment differently with Artri hugging her and kissing, not discussing her ability to carry the baby to term. “But how it’s possible I have noticed nothing unusual. Like… it’s…”


Ya don't see the signs

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes
“Don’t worry,” Perry smiled comfortingly. “It’s still early, you will have the symptoms in abundance soon.”

“The last time I was feeling just awful and instantly knew what it was even of I never got pregnant before.”

“Hopefully this time it all will be easier. Just in case we will check the level of stress hormones too but not today. Now I’ll rather leave you to celebrate. And no, you need not walk me to my ship.”

When the old man has gone Vien was still standing in the middle of their Perennian infirmary. She looked at her master unsure what to do.

“So,” she whispered, “you will have what you wanted and sooner than expected.”

“Please, don’t say you didn’t want it too.”
The man came closer at last. He lifted her chin to look into Vivianne’s cobalt blue eyes already full of fresh tears.
“No need to despair. All that was promised I will intend to keep,” Artri said licking them carefully.
“I’ll worship the ground you will walk on. I will respect you, I’ll share with you everything I have. There will be the best medical care and trusted women to help you with babies. I’ll be your servant and most humble slave. Just say what you want and if it’s in my might you will have it as soon as possible.”

“For now, I only want to lay down for a bit. I’ll... I’ll think about the rest later,” Vien managed weakly trying to put the brave smile on her face.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is plain awful. I'm stressed and have writer's block for a week or so now. Maybe I'll try to rewrite it later but now it must stay as it is.

The title comes from early 00's song by Mark B and Blade. It was one of the very few hip hop songs I ever liked,
When Vivianne woke up the next morning Artri was lying on his side, with green eyes fixed on her body. He didn’t even blink when saw her consciousness returning.

“Natti, are you daydreaming?” She asked the scientist.

“No,” he smiled lightly, “as soon as the day dawned I was looking at my young pregnant lover and still can’t get enough of the view.”

“I guess I don’t look differently than two days ago,” she smirked. “Nor do I smell differently, as you were gracious enough to inform Perry and me.”

“Let’s guess, you want your master to apologize more for that infamous slip of his? Yesterday was not enough? You know I’d love to, darling, but we have so much to do before the great day arrives.”

He never looked at her that way. And it wasn’t the look anyone should fear. It was the moment Vien realised she’s untouchable. No more starvings, no more beatings and it can only get better.

“The great day? It’s barely four weeks,” Vivianne snorted disbelievingly. “We have the ocean of time before anything would be needed.”

“You may not feel that well much longer. I hope it won’t be bad at all but It would not hurt to have everything ready.”

Vien crawled to him. “My sweet, considerate, ever conscious, future father,” she whispered depositing her weight on the male’s gorgeous body. Maybe Sara was wrong this time, she thought when caught in a warm, soft embrace. It would be great to stay here like this forever.

They were in slave house once again. It was Yermund Alvard who welcomed them. He didn’t expect the visit by that pair anymore. The aging administrator had to be utterly uncomfortable in the man’s presence whom he once gravely offended by his incompetence and barely escaped dire consequences afterwards.

“Welcome Mr. Kennert,” he said bowing slightly. “How can I be of service?” Vien soon noticed he tried to ignore her presence. Like she was nonexistent or at least translucent. It was something her master was not set to tolerate.

“Dear Mr. Alvard where are your good manners?” He asked not trying to hide the disdain in his tone. “You won’t say hello to that sweet kitten of mine?” Vien for the moment was close to pity the man so to ease his anxiety she spoke first.

“Good evening, Mr. Alvard, it’s nice to meet you again in much more fortunate circumstances.”

“Hello, young lady, it is good to meet you too in a good health and… good graces.” Yermund managed at last looking at her with more than the hint of gratefulness.

“Now it was better,” Kennert stated brusquely. “And say she’s pretty because she is.”

“You look beautiful, child.” Yermund didn’t dare to refuse.

“I thank you, Mr. Alvard,” Vien nodded gracefully and waited for her master to speak.
Artri Kennert satisfied at last by the reception quickly described the reasons of their visit.

Once more the administrator looked visibly uncomfortable. “I’m very sorry but,” he nearly stuttered, “there are no freshly acquired transports from Double X Zone and there were none for some time. So I’m afraid I have got nothing suitable to offer you.”

Hearing this Vien stood on her toes to whisper into the scientist’s ear what she was thinking the situation required. Artri nodded and turned to Yermund once more.

“My slave,” he said, “wants to take the look. Maybe we will find what we’re looking for among our native girls. Can you give as the tour?”

“With pleasure!” Alvard was eager to please. And so they went.
Bini. Part 1

Artri soon realised, being the personal bodyguard to his pregnant lover, could be counted among most favourite jobs, he ever embarked on. It was almost incomprehensible how he could let her come here multiple times with no supervision before. It was like asking for a disaster. But luckily those days were forever gone now.

Watching her talking animatedly with common slaves was also the enormous pleasure. Artri left all conversations entirely to the girl and was only listening, looking and judging for himself. The choice will be hers if she would choose today. There was no terrible rush. It was better to wait and pick someone worthy to accompany her precious person. But they were here and could check, it was a wise decision to use the occasion. There will be enough time for a probationary period and change in case their expectations could not be met. Vien was polite and friendly but Artri could tell she has chosen no one so far. Until they came to closed doors.

Yerm had left the pair to their own devices to not eavesdrop on them so Artri had to summon the man to ask about the inhabitant of this cell. Instead of administrator one of his employees emerged from the corridor.

“Good evening, Mr. Kennert,” he said. “The boss is busy so sent me in his stead. How can I be of help? Have you chosen already, perhaps?”

“We didn’t,” Artri answered, “so my mistress wants to find who’s in there. Who knows, maybe it’s the one she’s looking for.”

“I suppose it won’t be the case, sir,” the guard said. “It’s just the cell for the slaves, who didn’t please their clients and therefore had to be punished according to their wishes.”

This was something Vien surely would not want to leave unchecked. And he was right in his guess. “Can we, master?” She whispered pleadingly, eyes sad and the whole demeanour uncomfortable. Artri felt like he could buy the whole institution if it would make her happy. He has just found another favourable use for his privileged position, to please his sweet beloved girl.

Unsurprisingly, the guard wasn’t eager to cooperate. “But sir, I really don’t know if you can. Besides it’s not the best idea…”

“I’m not asking about your opinion, young man.” Artri was not impressed. “You aren’t here to act as our self-proclaimed advisor but to open that door. So can you do it, please?”

“But, Mr. Kennert,” the man had audacity to refuse him, in the presence of Artri’s own slave girl, no less.

Before he could retort Alvard appeared, panting slightly. “It’s okay,” he said. “Reg, you can return to your duties. I’ll take care about our venerable guests.” “I’m sorry for that Mattis boy,” he turned to Art and Vien. “He’s new here, so he didn’t know but I had no one else available to send. Actually, there’s only one woman in the detention cell. She was punished accordingly for her untoward behaviour in her client’s house. But if you really want to look…”

“Of course we want, we wouldn’t be asking if we didn’t,” Artri was already vexed. “What’s her name?”

“One Bini, if I remember correctly,” Yerm answered.
Vivianne almost jumped hearing the name. “Our Bini?” she gasped.

“Bini... and?” Artri inquired.

“Just Bini,” Yerm shrugged. “No one has the time to invent last names for wenches like these, born of nameless carriers and destined to...” Alvard stopped abruptly noticing at last the signals Artri was sending him from behind Vivianne’s back.

“It will be okay,” Art whispered embracing his very shocked slave. “I’ll check what state she’s in. You stay here with Yermund and wait.”

“But I want to see her too,” Vien was insistent, as he could expect from the one born and raised in the Argossynian System.

“You will stay here,” Artri had to be adamant in this case. “We cannot take such a risk now, you know this. I’ll check on her and if need be, we’ll send for the doctor. Not the one from this house but real medic. Trust me darling, I know what to do.”

“Okay,” Vien mumbled, not quite convinced, but complied, to not make the scene in front of the administrator. She has learned much since her first arrival to the XY Zone.

When Artri entered at last, he saw it really was Bini they both knew, but he never saw that woman in such a miserable state. Always merry and eager to serve, it was hard to imagine her reluctant or neglecting her duties to the extent demanding punishment like this. She was severely beaten and tied to the wooden cot. Hot from fever and barely conscious Bini needed immediate help to survive. Without further thinking Artri used his communicator to call for the medic, describing the state of things.

“Not now,” he said when Vien asked him if she can enter the cell. “After the doctor tends to her injuries, she’ll be transferred to our rooms. I have already summoned my men. They’ll see to the rest. We can go home now and wait.”

For the moment Vien looked as if she wanted to argue but relented miraculously after what looked like short internal battle.

“I thank you, my lord,” she said eventually.

“The pleasure is all mine,” Artri embraced the girl, pleased by her agreeable manners.

“I’m buying the poor thing,” he informed Yerm. “Just send me the price. Whoever she made her enemy lately the girl won’t be safe here anymore. Oh, and before the doc arrives give her something more to drink. She gulped all the water that was in her cell.”

Soon Bini was safe in their home, sleeping peacefully after tending to her injuries and not feverish anymore.

“Well,” Artri said to Vien, sitting on his lap, “we were supposed to find someone to take care of you, not needing that much care for herself.”

“I need none yet,” she smiled. “I’m not ill, I’m only pregnant. I hope Bini will recover soon. When she’ll feel better, I’ll ask her if she wants to stay with me as my companion. You don’t know, master, but Bini tried to help me one time, risking punishment. Not severe like her last but still.”

“Really?” For Artri it was new. “So I have to reward her for this. How come I didn’t know?”

“Well,” she looked at him with some hesitation. “It’s because you could be the one, my lord, to order said punishment for her attempted crime.”
Even before knowing, what she exactly meant, Artri felt terrible unease growing in his gut. “Go on,” he said, ignoring the feeling. “I think I should hear about it, it’s better late than never.”

“I was in a deep disfavour. You ordered to bring me to the party to serve your guests and Bini was there too, among other available girls. She recognised me and soon noticed I was starving. For the rest of the evening she tried to contraband something for me to eat. She didn’t manage, we were both too closely guarded, but she tried. It was from the pure goodness of the heart. There was literally nothing she could gain from helping the doomed creature like me and yet didn’t hesitate to take the risk. I still wonder sometimes what would you do to her if you knew.”

Artri knew the answer but couldn’t tell her the truth. It would be Vien herself, who would suffer for every revealed attempt to help the slave against her owner’s will.

“I can’t tell now,” he said instead. “I’m no longer in that mood.”

Luckily Vien didn’t ask further.
Bini. Part 2

Bini was happy. She never had the home of her own. The girl was not that attractive to make anyone wanting her to be their permanent slave or lucky enough, to meet the one who would like to keep her, even as the servant.

Her father was anonymous sperm donor and mother - nameless carrier from the birthing house. Raised in depersonalised at best, hostile at worse, institutions she served at an early age and was doing it until this day. Bini was eagerly clinging to anyone, who was willing to give her the hint of interest or sympathy. And now she was asked (politely, not ordered) to live in a sophisticated household of the famous and influential man.

Her mistress was amiable, young creature, Bini has met before, treating her more like very much needed friend than the maidservant. And Mr. Kennert was truly an angel in disguise. She knew him so far from occasional meetings as imposing, commanding figure, demanding obedience and respect. At home he was nothing but. Bini’s new mistress, and she with her, could enjoy the great deal of freedom. Bini could not comprehend how it’s possible they are dealing with exactly the same man, who let his disgraced slave to suffer prolonged hunger and abuse. She remembered that last day they met vividly but was too afraid to ask, in case they would punish her for the attempt at forbidden action, or worse - dispelled from the scientist’s household. And this was the last thing Bini wanted.

Mistress Vivianne, or rather Vien as she preferred to call her, soon started to teach her about many things Bini never heard of before. Some of them were very interesting, some not so much but she never complained. Th mistress also encouraged her to study and to explore various fields of knowledge by herself and here Bini had to confess she doesn’t know letters. Mistress said it was a shame on those who raised her and immediately saw to mend that terrible negligence.

It was nice to be the educated woman but even nicer were Bini’s new wardrobe, her own comfortable bedroom, excellent food and medical care provided by the same doctor who was supervising Vivianne’s pregnancy. Luckily her mistress was feeling well enough. She had no hint of morning sickness, only slight heartburn for a few weeks but even this disappeared with no special treatment. The girl was perfectly healthy so the doctors let Vien to share the bed with her master with little restrictions, the fact of which, Bini knew, the expecting pair was making very enthusiastic use.

All was well and calm in Mr. Kennert’s household until one day when something strange and mysterious happened. Someone called mistress Vien using her private communicator. She talked to that person more and more animatedly than shut herself in her bedroom with it. After some time she burst through the doors and ran toward Mr. Kennert’s private rooms, hand on her six months pregnant belly.

Bini didn’t know what to do. These were affairs between the mistress and her master so she could only wait.

“You? It was you...” her voice was trembling.

“What do you mean sweetling?” The black-maned looked at his now visibly pregnant slave surprised. “I have done nothing, I’m just working…”

“Not now, you monster! It was you who demanded retrieving me from Argossyne. You made the
agreement with your secret services to… to get me! You knew they will torture me and you allowed that!”

“It’s not how you think,” Artri tried to explain. “It was them, who came to me first. I could not stop them. I’m not that powerful. I could only demand for you not to be hurt too much and be sent to me after all the interrogations. It’s all, I swear. I came for you as soon as it was possible.”

“But you haven’t told me! If you are that innocent why you haven’t told me?!”

“I was afraid you wouldn’t like to look at me anymore…”

“And you’re right. I can’t!” she spat.

“Viv,” he tried one more time, but she yelled at him, now seriously infuriated.

“What have I done to you for treating me that way? Don’t I deserve for once to be honest with me? Don’t touch me! Ever again!” She pulled her hand out of his clumsy effort to hold her and fuming left the room.
“What happened?” Bini looked at Vien with an obvious worry in her hazel eyes. “Did you…” The girl was too afraid to finish the sentence but Vien didn’t have the heart to soothe the other woman’s anxiety just now.
“I’m sorry,” she said, still slightly trembling after her clash with the master. “I have to be alone, excuse me.”
That said Vivianne closed the door to her bedroom and blocked it. She curled in the armchair as much as her belly allowed and let her tears to fall freely at last.

Vien was utterly devastated and desperate. For the first time in the XY Zone she was feeling happy, expecting even brighter future, and how it ended?
It was all fraud and lie. How can she trust him after this? How can she hope he will keep his promises, regarding her and their child, when could not be honest in such an important matter before? Now he’s good for Vien because she’s carrying their baby but she couldn’t be sure he won’t separate them after birth. He can do anything and Vien has no means to stop him.

Little Jaye Branford was blessedly unaware of his mother’s insecurities and fears, making his usual evening exercises. Vien has put both hands on her vibrating stomach. It was her and Artri’s favourite pastime lately, to watch that lively, most precious thing, playing vigorously inside her womb.

“What shall we do now, little one?” she sobbed. Her seemingly safe world was crashing down around her and Vien felt burdened beyond measure by an enormous weight of her new responsibility. Sara was trying to warn Vien, and Jon long before her, but Vivianne didn’t listen and now her unborn son was the hostage of that unpredictable and dangerous being.

And of course the man had to come after them, demanding to let him in. She had no choice but to comply lest the doors would be opened forcibly.

“I’ve said, do not touch me anymore!” she warned him when Artri wanted to come closer.

“Viv, sweet darling, you surely don’t mean it. You cannot punish me that severely for what was my only mistake in this. It changes nothing. Haven’t I been good to you since you decided to not go?”

“You were implying to be the saviour of mine, while collaborating with my captors! With those butchers? How could you? I believed you and you lied!”

“Darling, I did not. They didn’t give me the choice. I didn’t want you to see me as weak. I was mortally afraid you would condemn me without giving your wayward partner the second chance. I couldn’t live without you. I tried, but it was like dying every day. You are the only person in whole habitable space I was ever afraid of. The only one I was ever ready to worship. See?”

His long black locks were wiping the floor at her feet. Artri was always the one for grand gestures but she wasn’t that naive girl anymore. The last cure was bitter but effective. Such cheap actions won’t change what she’s thinking.

“You want the second chance, sweet sir?” She cooed.

Artri raised his pretty head and looked at her expectantly.
“Okay, then let me go as you promised!”

The answer was sharp and swift.
“No.”

After that Artri tried to sweeten his outright refusal. “I mean,” he said, standing in a respectable distance, “you can’t embark on space travel in your current state. They are usually safe but who knows what may happen. I can’t accept the risk after waiting for more than the quarter of the century for this. When you’ll deliver, we can return to the matter. Maybe it will be easier for your sister to get the political asylum for her nephew’s father. I can fake my death here easily and go there incognito if she’s afraid they would be persecuted because of my presence on Argossyne. Whatever. I can do anything if it’s safe for you and our baby. Space travel now, that far and close to bloody Riadis, is surely not.”

Vivianne’s blood nearly boiled. “Do you think me that stupid, master? I know you’re only stalling. You will never let us go!”

“When the time comes, I will prove you’re wrong,” Artri responded with untouched dignity. “But now I better leave. Please try to calm down for the sake of our baby. And don’t close the entrance to your room. I want Bini to keep an eye on you.”

The scientist sent Vien one last look and spared her his presence. He left the doors opened.

Chapter End Notes

Haus der Lüge was 1989 album and also one of the songs on it by industrial legend Einstürzende Neubauten.
Bini was scared. She has heard nearly everything that passed between Vivianne and the father of her baby. The way she was addressing him, boldly challenging him, like she was more than his equal, superior to him, filled the girl with fear of what could become of it. Even if the mistress was big with child, it wasn’t unheard of that pregnant slaves, who gravely offended their owners or weren’t obedient enough, could still be beaten in a way not endangering their loads.

But Mr. Kennert proved to be the true gentleman and an indulgent caretaker, letting her remain unscathed and didn’t punish her in the slightest for the insolence she had shown him. Bini gave the sigh of relief when the scientist left Vivianne’s bedroom, ordering her to take care of their lady.

Vien blessedly didn’t protest against it. She even let Bini cuddle with her in mistress’s bed. Hopefully, the storm had gone for good.

When Artri returned from his early morning walk found Vien sitting in the plastochair in his office. On her, slightly spotted face there wasn’t any trace of yesterday’s crying. The girl seemed relaxed and in a playful mood, judging by her mischievous smiles and the strip of naked skin of her pleasantly rounded belly, visible between the edges of loosely tied dressing gown. Seeing him she bared it completely letting Art to look at her protruding navel, clean-shaven mound and a dark line connecting them - the picture of a perfect seductress. She knew what such a view was doing to him.

“I’m sorry,” she said, looking him in the eyes. “For what I have done yesterday, I mean. It was unnecessary. I beg your forgiveness, my sweet lord. Please blame it on my pregnancy hormones, they must be responsible for my much too exaggerated response to the revelations uncovered before me. That person did it out of pure jealousy.”

Artri came closer and kneeled before his mistress.
“No,” he said, ”it was me. I shouldn’t do what I have done. And even yesterday I was too harsh and unfeeling. I… your errant slave needs suitable punishment to repent for his crimes against his most generous and wonderful lady.”

“There’s no need to punish you, my darling boy. Just take me to bed. You have neglected your duties yesterday so now have to work twice as hard to satisfy your mistress. Are you ready to do your duty?”

Vien could be insatiable now so Artri didn’t want to keep her waiting.
“For you I’m always ready,” he smiled reaching for her warm, willing body.

“Can we make it quick, I mean the first time?” She whimpered, apparently ripe for immediate taking.
“Okay,” he intended to position her on hands and knees but Vivianne shook her head and asked him instead to lay on his back.
When he complied she slowly lowered herself on her lover’s manhood letting his cock to breach her soft, wet lips. Soon Vien was riding him, moaning and sighing constantly, while keeping her breasts in both hands. They had darkened aureolas and were already much bigger than before she got pregnant. Somehow his pretty girl has transformed herself into fully mature woman. Her whole body was wearing the signs of her current physiological state and all of her belonged to him and his
offspring. It was glorious. It was worthy all those decades of waiting. Artri Nathoo has found his perfect other half at last and won’t ever let her go.
Vien came to him in the evening also, and equally eager as in the morning. “Isn’t it too much?” he smiled indulgently. “You will surely give birth to some kind of incurable sexoholic, with his pregnant mother being in the state of constant arousal.”

“Oh, don’t be lazy,” she purred seductively, “or I’ll find some willing young guard to help me with my troubles. I can take aboard whoever I want now when the load is deposited safely in my storage.”

Artri came closer to embrace and kiss her but it didn’t end with that. He pulled her skirt up to place his hands on her already huge belly. It was easy when she had been strictly prohibited from using any kind of underwear. All Vari’s nasty insinuations about her inability to bear him healthy offspring seemed firmly contradicted by the person in front of him. Seemingly fragile creature was the epitome of triumphant fertility. If it all will go on like that, they will end as parents of many beautiful boys and maybe even some girls, to ensure the loyalty of their prospective owners.

“So a naughty girl you are, princess. And for the naughtiness bad girls are punished by their masters. Now on your knees little mother and worship the one who has made you that nicely rounded.”

Vien didn’t need to be asked twice. She lowered herself on the floor and pulled out his more than ready manhood. Her pink tongue embraced the underside of his cock when she tasted him. With a little teasing she swallowed him whole and her throat deliciously constructed itself around his length. He helped her to achieve most perfect tempo of her fawn head’s movements. She was putting herself whole into pleasuring her lover, attentive, enthusiastic and so wonderfully pliant in his hands. The girl has loosened her throat even more to receive him deeper emitting wet, choking sounds he knew and valued so dearly. Pathetic remains of his self-restraint were soon crumbling and Artri had to retreat not wanting to feed their son with his seed accidentally. It aimed to her breasts and belly instead, painting them with streaks of a pearly white.

Vien sat on the balls of her feet panting and smiling, with the fawn hair in disarray and chest in splotches of red. Little spots on her face and neck, she gained at the beginning of her first trimester, were more visible and much darker now after she strained herself to please her master. Vien was sometimes complaining, he has made her ugly by his actions, but Artri could imagine nothing more appealing and lovely than those signs of her ultimate usefulness for him and his family. He could kiss them for hours, together with her similarly darkened nipples. Artri always admired pregnant females but to have so close to him, the one with the waist bulged admirably because of his own doing, was something beyond expectations.

“So where’s the punishment you have promised me, master?” she asked, feigning complete innocence.

“Well, what about cleaning you up and then tying to bed and letting me worship you until the morning?”
Her playful disposition gave way to worry in a split second.
“Nathoo, anything but restraining me. I’ll do anything, please, but not this!”

“It’s okay, so let’s do it without restraints,” he complied without the fuss, giving pregnant slave his hand, helping Vien to stand on her feet. “Whatever you need I’ll give you, as promised.”

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Bini didn’t expect her mistress tonight but Vien returned to her chambers late in the evening.

“Can you believe I have exhausted the man?” she smiled to her maid.
“I didn’t know those modified males may be that easy to tire. Poor thing has passed out as soon as we finished.”

Seeing horrified expression on former public slave’s round face Vivianne burst with laughter. Bini was an intelligent woman and a fast learner in many things but talking about rulers of the XY Zone in such a frivolous manner was one of those she couldn’t accept at all.

“I’m sorry,” Vien whispered. “I didn’t want to make you uncomfortable. It’s just… Can you imagine I could take a bath and then make a short walk and he wasn’t able to turn from one side to another?!”

“Do you want me to sleep with you?” Bini asked, trying to ignore her young mistress’s antics. If Mr. Kennert himself was not only tolerating them but also encouraged her to break even more rules, the servant in their house had no right to complain.

“No, thank you, Bini,” Vien suddenly became serious. “You are a great companion and I’m grateful for your offer but today I prefer to sleep alone, only with my baby. I think I’m tired too, so please do not wake me early in the morning.”

She kissed Bini on the forehead and disappeared in the sanctuary of her bedroom.

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The sun was high above the compound but doors to Vivianne’s bedroom remained closed. Bini had time to eat breakfast and drink coffee. Vien never demanded to wait for her with the meal so the woman helped herself generously. She was always kind of big eater. For her food was much better than sex. The latter was for years her duty, regardless if she wanted it or no, but until she was chosen by mistress Vivianne, Bini rarely could indulge herself with fancy foods.

She giggled happily, thinking about Vien, ridiculing her master for passing out but now suffering from results of similar exhaustion. Regardless of their unusual way of behaving, Mr. Kennert and his personal slave made an amazing pair, and it was the great privilege to serve them.

Another hour passed and Vivianne was still sleeping. Bini didn’t dare to defy her mistress’s orders so she let her remain undisturbed. Mr. Kennert, as it soon turned out, wasn’t that patient. He came to women’s part of the house seeking his lover. The man was dressed in light green shirt, nicely complementing more intense colour of his eyes. The raven hair of the scientist was loosely tied behind with some locks escaping from the ribbon and adorning his pale forehead. The master of the house was such an eye candy, Bini could watch him the whole day. The man himself pulled a young woman out of her reverie, inquiring about his mistress.

“What’s that filly of mine again?” He asked, not seeing Vivianne around. “Or should I rather say
my stud mare?” he mused. “When you’ll see your lady please remind her about today’s visit of the birthing instructor. Her exercises are starting in an hour.”

“Oh, my Goddess!” Bini picked the phrase from the mistress and was using it frequently now. “Mistress Vivianne told me not to wake her but, apparently, she had forgotten about the visit. I must tell her immediately!”

“What does that mean?!?” Artri Kennert sounded appalled. “Isn’t she awakened yet? That late? She should drink something and eat.”

The scientist approached the doors, but someone blocked them. Again, like that last time. “I have told her not to do it anymore,” he mumbled, now dangerously close to angry. “Vien, sweetling, open, please!” The male called. “Wake up sleeper, it’s late!”

The answer was silence.
Standing on the Edge

Chapter Notes

I guess it’s not the chapter for very sensitive people.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Artri swore internally when Vivianne didn’t respond to his many calls. Something was wrong. The physicist was trusting her lately to the extent he didn’t posses any means to open the door to his slave’s private rooms without explicit permission of their inhabitant.

He couldn’t help but think now, it was stupid. Because what if she fainted or something like that? His precious girl seemed to be perfectly healthy so far but still was carrying modified offspring and it always may lead to unpredictable interactions. Artri should be wary of that and yet he endangered the safety of mother and baby once more. Luckily cameras in the room were only turned off, not dismantled, so Artri could summon them to life and check on his filly.

At first sight everything seemed fairly normal. Vien was lying on her side with the right hand on her distended abdomen. She looked just like sleeping. And then he noticed all windows were shut and obscured by the curtains. It was at least mildly confusing.

Artri had changed the angle and used the zoom to inspect the fallow haired woman. There was the streak of dried saliva on her left cheek and in front of her mouth on the pillow Artri saw something blackish. The zoom was on maximum so he couldn’t see more clearly but it was enough for his hair to stand on the ends. It looked dangerously like the results of an internal hemorrhage. But how? It was impossible. Pregnant slave was under meticulous medical control, so meticulous in fact, she often tried to protest against the rigid regime, designed by Art and her doctors for the expecting mother and her most important baby. Vivianne’s last through examinations took place less than the week ago. It would be impossible to omit something so grave. Unless…

Artri summoned his guards to open the door by force and while waiting for them he sent an urgent message to the medics. One of them was living on Perennis so he should appear as first. For the moment he hesitated before summoning Perry but soon his sense of duty prevailed and Artri did it. Percy was much too experienced to resign from his help in such a crucial moment. Whatever happened to her. Artri tried not to give up to the panic. Even if she’s dead already, it was not too late to start the regeneration process. But first they had to know.

When at last he could enter, Artri ran to check the state of his unconscious slave. Luckily she was alive even if her pulse was barely detectable. Vien didn’t respond when he tried to talk to her. She didn’t even flinch. The stench of stale vomit, sweat and urine was surrounding moveless body, which was yesterday so full of life and passion. Mysterious mass on the pillow didn’t look like congealed blood. When he rubbed a bit between his fingers, it reminded him not thoroughly chewed parts of some dark-coloured fruits, but he was no botanist so couldn’t be sure. The baby wasn’t moving but at least there was no trace of blood between pregnant girl’s legs. Maybe his son has survived too, but he had no means to check it now.

“Ivvi, what have you done?” He whispered to the unconscious girl, but it was not the time for rhetorical questions. Artri lifted the limp woman from the bed, not caring in the slightest for the bodily fluids covering her body. He will wash himself, and Vien, later.
“I’m taking Viv to the infirmary,” he said to three guards surrounding him and waiting for further orders. “Please send the doctors there when they’ll arrive. One of you comes with me. One waits for the medics and you, Ron, take that maid of hers and put her to the cell. I’ll take care of the wench later. Oh, and one more thing. Nobody from the outside of our circle and medical staff has the right to know what happened here. Not even your colleagues. Understood?”

“Yes, sir,” they all responded like one man.

With the help of Grant Artri deposited unconscious body he was carrying on the clean bed in the room next to his mistress’s long prepared birthing chamber. He still hoped they will use it, according to its intended destiny, in about fourteen weeks' time from now.

Waiting for the medics to come he has cleaned Vivianne’s tongue and mouth from the inky goo she has thrown up. After that Artri has passed unidentified substance to the guard for chemical examination. The man has put it immediately into the analytical apparatus. Results should appear soon. Luckily she had to be laying on her side when vomiting so most of it ended outside of her mouth and not inside, suffocating her.

Artri didn’t know what to do next, to not make it worse accidentally, so decided it’s only safe to clean the girl. When he was washing her gently with a wet soft cloth seemed to him her lovely belly twitched a little. Artri dismissed it at first as wishful thinking but soon he noticed another movement. Maybe not that vigorous as in some evenings but definitely it was there.

“Hold on, little one,” Artri Nathoo thought to himself. “Hold on, the help is coming.”

Soon the apparatus could determine the composition of the sample. Among the long list of various substances there was one name flashing with angry red - anerlinine.

“What the hell is that?” Artri spat. “I have never heard about such thing. Check it at once, Grantie.”

Before Artri’s employee could fulfill his order Wren Calderstone appeared at last.

“My baby has been poisoned,” Artri said to the medic. “Apparently with something called anerlinine.”

The suction of gastrointestinal content, intravenously administered antidote and placental blockade were the main medical procedures applied by Wren. In the meantime Percy Salter arrived and could consult the case. He has confirmed the correctness of the decisions made by his predecessor.

“Don’t worry, Artri, they will both live,” Perry said seeing still ashen face of the scientist. “I suspect no lasting damage for any of them. We will check everything in a most detailed way possible, mother, baby and placenta, for you to be sure. We were lucky she has vomited most, so only the small part of possible dose was ingested.”

Artri only nodded, looking at Vien, who in that exact moment moved her head slightly, mumbling something unintelligible. Now when they were out of immediate danger, he needed desperately his friend Tommy Fisher with the whip. But he couldn’t afford to indulge himself that way. Of one thing he was sure. That bloody Argossynian girl will be the death of him.
Anerlinine is an alkaloid, it doesn’t exist in the real world. Description of its effects is partly based on parasympathomimetic substances like pilocarpine for example.
When Vien opened her eyes, after something what was apparently long and strange dream, she has spotted the person she didn’t expect to meet again soon, sitting next to her bed.

“Lea? What are you doing here?” She asked, looking disbelievingly at her former maidservant. The dark blond woman looked back and answered with a dispassionate voice. “I belong to this household, exactly like you, first lady.”

“Stop that lady nonsense again,” Vien snorted.
She felt the kick inside. “My sweet, little whelp is strong;” she thought and in that exact moment everything returned to her.

It was her baby she tried to escape with, but something went not exactly how Vien planned. Those damn berries were so, so bitter but she has eaten them that many it could kill an elephant. But it was not enough and now they were still in that man’s grip.

She ordered herself to stay calm. If her owner wanted Vien dead, the child would be already taken from her and put into the incubator and their mother waiting for the torture or execution or both. If Jaye is with her, it most probably means, she should live, at least to the baby’s birth. It must be enough time to make peace with his father. If they didn’t let Vien die together with her son, she had to live for him, despite of who is the other parent and especially because of the other parent.

She had her one last chance but lost it. Vien knew she wouldn’t have another. No way they will let her out of their sight even for the split second. Now she will be truly the womb in her master’s service, the broodmare, spending the rest of her pathetic existence between his bed and birthing chamber. And she could swear, the latter will be used frequently through the years to come, until she won’t be able to conceive anymore. Just how Jon has predicted at the beginning.

It was finally over. She was dead and buried, definitely this time and this was the first day of Vivianne’s afterlife.

Having no choice anymore felt almost peaceful, but it lasted only for the short moment, until one terrible thought hit her abruptly.

“Where’s Bini?” Vien asked Leandra, dreading the answer.

“Your Bini is safe and sound,” interrupted undeniably masculine voice. “As long as you’ll act as nice, obedient and diligent slave no harm will become her, even if she has disappointed me gravely, letting you act crazy.”

Vien sighed internally. It wasn’t necessary. She will be good without extortion, there’s no need to threaten her with the harm done to that poor girl.

“Can I see her, my lord?” She asked.

“When the time comes, yes. But not yet.” Artri said. “Leandra, leave us,” he ordered, approaching Vivianne’s bed.

“I apologize for what I have done, my lord. It won’t do it ever again,” she whispered, watching him cautiously.

“I’m sure you will not,” he smiled one of those unsettling smiles of his. “Because you won’t be given the occasion to act so selfish and cruel. But,” his demeanour softened,
“we will talk about it when you will fully recover. There’s nothing more important than this. For all of us.”

She tried to relax. There was no point in fighting him anymore. No way she could win this unequal fight. That much she knew already.
Artri took Vivianne’s hand to kiss her fingers. “Don’t worry, pretty baby, I will take care of you. Everything will be all right.”

These were exactly the same words Artri said to her in the garden when Vien was fainting out of hunger after they touched themselves for the first time. When they weren’t lovers yet. Nearly two Galdanedian years have passed since that moment and she was still in his might. Now probably more than ever. Vien shivered involuntarily.

“Are you cold, sweet darling?” The man asked with a beatific smile, adjusting the blanket covering his slave’s pregnant body.
“A little,” she lied. “But I think you can warm me, anytime you want, my lord.”
Vien could leave the bed soon after her last talk with the master. There was no need to recline the whole day, a little movement will do her good. She didn’t want to bear the lazy baby after all.

Strengthening her aching back Vien looked at her belly. It was of similar size as Nelly’s soon before Murray was born. Apparently with Jaye his father’s genes prevailed in a ruling of the foetus’s growth speed. Not very nice perspective for her final weeks.

She patted her stomach lightly. “Please don’t listen to me, froglet. It’s not your fault. I don’t blame you,” she whispered to it fondly. “I’m sorry for trying to kill us. I only wanted us free, but it was rather stupid way to achieve it. To kill oneself because of the man? I knew he’s a liar already so what did I expect? I knew this all before and yet let him impregnate me. I was telling myself it was to save the universe from him and I think I believed it, when in reality it was all because of your father’s pretty eyes, glorious hair and that aristocratic nose of his. Not to forget his matter and space breaking mind, surprisingly clumsy when it comes to feelings. Because I love him, Jaye. I really do, even if he’s a monster, set on using me mercilessly. I’m telling you this in secret. He cannot know about it. It would be the death of me if he knew what kind of power he holds over your unhappy mother. I was fighting with it for the long time, winning and losing in turns. I wanted to forget, I wanted him dead, because only his or my death would free me from the curse that man is. If I’ll die in labour, or he will kill me after, you should not worry. He will never hurt you. I know this. Because maybe he’s a monster and a fierce killer but a monster with standards, without doubt. And Lea will love you like her own child. Somehow I know this. She hates me, but will love you, like your other aunts, and uncles, would too.”

After talking with her little one Vien was feeling much better and bold enough to visit the black-maned’s lair.

“What are you doing here?” he asked not even rising his head to greet her. “There’s no need to woo me anymore. It won’t bring you any substantial benefits so you can as well stop pretending.” There was bitterness in his voice so deep she wanted to hug him immediately. So at last she made him really suffer. But Vien was already far beyond it and it couldn’t give her the satisfaction once she would feel in similar circumstances.

“I came to apologize, my lord,” she said bowing her head. “I should do this when you have visited me earlier but, silly me, I didn’t even know how to start.”

“And now you know?” He asked slightly amused.

“No, but I was wondering, master, maybe you will help me with my hard task?” She risked looking at him. Unfortunately for his slave Artri’s captivating features were fairly impassive. She couldn’t read anything from his beautiful face. The accompanying silence wasn’t the good sign at all. “I’m sorry. I didn’t want to interfere if you are busy just now…” Before she has the time to turn Artri stopped her.

“Stay,” he said. “And, you may come closer.”

She did as Artri told her, standing soon in front of his desk, like a student, waiting for the examiner’s permission to speak, even if usually students aren’t six months pregnant with their professors.

“So, what is the true reason behind your presence here, Squirrel? What else do you want from me?
I’ve told you I’ll take care of you. I’m not that perverted to punish pregnant girl however stupid or cruel her doings. Everything will be like before. Except for better supervision over you and even more detailed examinations. And, after a few days we will leave for Galdanede. I have sheltered you here for too long. It’s time to show the wider audience how your once rebellious body serves me as it should long ago. It will cement your position before the baby is born. They have to see you as a humble presence at my side, to forget more easily how things were before. For my son to have the mother he could have respect for. It will be all. You can go now.”

For the short moment he looked exhausted before his features were schooled again into their previous, impenetrable stare.

Vien didn’t complete her task but it wouldn’t be good to vex him on the day like today so the girl acknowledged her sorrowful defeat. She curtsied clumsily and left the man to his thoughts, thinking already when it would be the best to try with him again.
Galdanedian worries

Chapter Summary

Six months pregnant Vivianne and her master move to Galdanede to stay there until the labour.

Vien didn’t know, how is it flying to Galdanede doesn’t count as space travel, but it didn’t somehow. Besides, it worried her Bini was to stay on Perennis. Master promised her they will do no harm to the woman but Vien was feeling unsettled because of this. She tried to mediate but was told her owner’s decision is final so the only thing she could do was to comply. Questioning the man’s authority could only aggravate the situation of them both. He didn’t even let her say farewell to the girl.

First thing after landing near The Research Centre was letting reporters to make as many pictures of her as anyone wanted. Vien tried to not pay attention to them, keeping her gaze impassive, like she wasn’t on display at all. This time, most surprisingly, they let the slave talk to interviewing staff so they asked the girl about her pregnancy and how she feels about herself, carrying the first son of the most famous scientist of The XY Zone.

To her utmost amazement Artri told reporters, her impending labour is to be semi-public affair with a large party in Cycads Valley to start soon after her first pains and with newly minted mother to be shown to the guests, soon after her ordeal’s successful end. It was meant to be the grand old school event held to boost her owner’s popularity.

Vien tried not to blush and Jaye apparently feeling his mother’s nervousness was kicking relentlessly in vicinity of her navel. It was extremely humiliating experience and Vien wanted to run and hide somewhere from their knowing smiles and cameras, mercilessly showing all her small, and not so small, imperfections. The sweat on her brow, those damn spots crowding her face and decolletage in stressing situations and visibly swollen ankles.

Truth be told she was feeling progressively worse and worse since her memorable suicide attempt. It was like the poisoning left lasting effects on her organism. It was surprising that she, who never had morning sickness in the beginning was sometimes, and now more often than ever, feeling nauseous and giddy.

It wasn’t her master but Lea, who noticed her unease and pointed it discretely to the man.

Artri looked at Vien passingly and said.
“I’m afraid gentlemen my mistress is tired. We must end our assembly now, but if any of you would like to make longer interview, I’ll gladly welcome you in Cycads Valley. All you need is to make an appointment with me a few days before the meeting.”

For Vien it was the great relief to find herself out of public eye. Apparently her stay on Galdanede would be trying and worrisome. She couldn’t shake the nagging feeling it had to be the punishment of sorts. Even if Artri explicitly promised not to plan any such a thing, it looked like barely veiled attempt to make her miserable because of what she tried to do.

Vien used the first available part of furniture to sit. Her head was spinning and nausea intensified. Artri seemed oblivious to her looks and feelings.
“The next time, darling,” he said standing over her, "try harder to show people you’re happy. It won’t do when you will behave like it was the curse of sorts not most desirable state every slave would be glad to find herself in.”

He was talking more but she couldn’t care less because in that moment everything around her blackened suddenly and pregnant slave lost the consciousness.

First thing Vien heard after awakening was the heated discussion, or rather quarrel, between her master and Mr. Salter.

“I have told you, Artri, she needs peace,” Perry reasoned. “Keeping her here, in a constant stress will aggravate the symptoms of her ailing. Especially now, when she has to be on immunity suppressants all the time. They make her weak by themselves alone. You need not add any more burdens to all the physiological strain her organism is already subjected to. The world won’t end if one girl spends last weeks of her pregnancy in comfortable seclusion.”

“Being in seclusion, Perry, gave your patient too much time to think about dangerous and unwished for ideas. Therefore, it makes sense to keep her sufficiently occupied.” Kennert didn’t agree. “And you surely exaggerate. It’s an easy work to say a few trinkets of information to the interviewers. Or to show her pretty face during social events from time to time. I don’t order her to entertain my guests with her…”

“Artri, stop it. It’s disgusting.” Percy spat. “I don’t know what has gotten into you, to act that irresponsible.”

“You call me irresponsible?”

For Vien it was enough. She didn’t want them to argue. And of course wanted explanations, as many as she can get.

Vivianne carefully lowered her feet to the floor, waiting for the while for her circulation to adapt to the upright position and only then dared to get up.

“What are suppressants you’re talking about?” She asked the medic from the threshold where she was standing.

Artri looked at her with cold contempt.
“Return to bed,” he said. “It’s not the conversation for you to hear, Squirrel.”

“Artri, she has the right to know,” Percy interfered. “It’s her health and wellbeing we’re discussing just now.”

“The same health and wellbeing she not so long ago took care of so graciously?” Artri asked with the acid in his tone. But Vien didn’t mind what he was saying.

“Perry, what’s happening?” she asked, extremely agitated. “Is it dangerous for my baby?”

Salter answered at once, ignoring Artri and his objections.

“At some point your immunological system started to attack placenta and the baby. To avoid damaging the foetal and placental tissues we are giving you in food and drink substances which shelter them from your antibodies. Unfortunately, we cannot switch off their production completely for various important reasons and therefore some of them are turning against your own organism. It’s not dangerous per se but weakens you and gives you the symptoms, that plagued you lately. I’m afraid they will intensify with time.”
“If only my froglet is safe the rest doesn’t matter,” Vien said, much relieved by Perry’s explanations.

“I’m impressed Squirrel. Your playing cautious and loving mother was the masterpiece of acting.” Artri commented sourly. “I hope you will put all your talent to convince the rest of the world you really are the one.”

“Don’t mind him,” Percy whispered to Vivianne when her owner left them. “He still feels hurt and shows this in not so elegant the manner. The man may be difficult for some time but he means you no harm. Not really.”

“I hope so,” Vien nodded. “Is it because of the poison I have taken?”

“Well, Artri wants to believe it because it’s always easier to have one specific person to put the blame on. But I don’t think so. You are the regular female and your son is modified. I have been expecting similar reaction since long. We are lucky it has developed fairly lately because it maximizes your chances to carry the baby to term and fully natural birth.”

Vien embraced him spontaneously. “Thank you Perry,” she said. “You’re the best human creature in all XY Zone I ever met. And the best doctor on both sides of Great Divide. I’m lucky to have you by my side through the hard times.”
Barriers

It wasn’t the good sign at all. Another evening passed and Artri didn’t invite her to sleep with him. He was absent through the whole days so she was spending them mostly with her doctors and Lea.

Former Vivianne’s friend wasn’t very talkative. Things were still awkward between them, Leandra blaming her for Argossynian affairs and the last attempt to quit her master’s service. It was all unforgivable sins in the other woman’s eyes. She was judging Vien harshly and deemed her unworthy of the position she was holding. So Lea was serving her in a most perfect way possible, attentive and helpful. She was massaging Vivianne’s constantly aching back, was holding her when she was vomiting accidentally, helped her to wash and dress. But despite being that close they were rarely talking, saying only what was necessary to communicate in everyday life.

In silent days like these Vien missed Bini terribly with her endearing enthusiasm and constant friendly prattle, her hunger for knowledge and not only for it.

And she missed the father of her child, who was ignoring her more and more visibly. After returning from work or some social gathering, usually late, the man barely asked about how she feels demanding most of the information about her state of being from the medical staff.

Sometimes Vivianne’s only available conversation partner was her unborn child. Not knowing if they wouldn’t be separated after his birth she was talking to him whenever they stayed alone. She was describing for Jaye in smallest details everyday life on Argossyne, history of its free planet state, both his aunts, her own childhood and youth. Vien sincerely hoped it would be possible to repeat all those things to her son when he will be able to understanding them.

After a few days of such irritating negligence, she couldn’t stand it anymore.

“Am I in disfavour again?” she asked haughtily one evening when Artri was ignoring her again. She felt a little better that day so could afford the straight back and proud stance. It was for the show only but the man didn’t need to know. Internally she was shaking dreading what he can say. It was easy to hurt her nowadays, one critical word could drive Vien to tears and one unfriendly look make her worry for hours.

“If I am,” she continued, “I demand outright punishment you think your slave deserves, not that creeping, crawling persecution I’m subjected to every day.”

“You demand something from me? In this house, after what you have done?” Artri’s reproachful look could kill lesser being but she had to be strong, if not for herself, than for her child.

“Our baby suffers for it, having his mother constantly nervous or upset. If I am no one for you, please take care at least of him.”

“I see your have turned your maternity into a useful weapon. Strange thing you remind yourself about it when you see fit and forget soon after.”

It was unjustified and hurting. But instead of bursting with tears Vien had chosen a different approach.

“No, really,” she smiled. “Do you think master it’s so easy to forget about this?” Before Artri had the chance to back off she came closer and took both his hands to place them under her pregnant belly.

“See? Please try to carry the weight like this day and night at least for a week without the respite and
then we can return to our discussion, sir.

That said, she turned to leave, despite her strained calmness feeling the tears pricking in her eyes. She blinked them furiously and kept going.
When Vien reached the bedroom her scanty tears have dried already. There was no point in despairing. It was just wasting of energy Vien could not afford in her current state. She should put it to better use than trying to move such a self-absorbed and narcissistic creature. She had most important duties but not regarding him.

“I’m exhausted,” she said to Lea. “It’s a good idea to nap for an hour or two. I’ll take the bath later.”

“Oh, Leandra,” Vien giggled. “I can take a shower without help. I’m only pregnant, not disabled. And no, I won’t drown myself, so you need not worry.”

“Okay, mistress,” Lea agreed. “So wake me up when you will need me.”

Young woman only nodded but Vien knew she won’t be sleeping, just in case. She was such dutiful servant. What a pity that also the master’s confidante.

Vivianne sighed. After her failed poisoning Vien was forbidden to shut the door behind her. Either to the bedroom or to the toilet. Her owner’s employees or Artri himself could control her anytime. And also there were regular inspections in her private rooms to check if she hides nothing even remotely dangerous for her or the baby. After Perennis the man was straight paranoid about it and his staff shared their boss’s obsession. Sometimes she was almost sure, if they only could they would gladly keep her naked all the time, so she couldn’t hide anything under her dresses or nightgowns.

So even now the door was slightly opened and Vien heard when Artri entered.

“Is your little mistress already sleeping?” He asked in a hushed tone.

“She’s not so little now, my lord,” the girl pointed good naturedly. “And I don’t think so. I heard her moving in bed recently. It’s difficult for her to find a comfortable position. The boy is very active in the evenings.”

“I see, you are very observant, Leandra. I’m glad of your services. You deserve some big reward, if you have something in mind already don’t hesitate to tell me.”

“You know Mr. Kennert, what I really deserve is the punishment for neglecting my mission, out of pure stubbornness. If I was there instead of that stupid fat girl it would never happen…”

“Please, not now. I want the word with my mistress before she falls asleep for good,” Artri cut off Leandra much to Vivianne’s delight. Lea had no right to call Bini stupid, much less fat. And when Artri entered, she has told him that.

“Okay,” he agreed. “Bini isn’t stupid. But I am. I shouldn’t treat you like I did lately. And I shouldn’t let you run like that. Please, I came to apologize. Will you go with me for the… atonement of your defiant slave?”

“Atonement?” Vien smiled sitting upright on the bed. “Is it how it is called nowadays?” She smiled throwing off the covers. Vivianne was naked under the blankets. Fawn locks were hanging down covering partly her darkened nipples.

Artri reached for Vien immediately to lift her pregnant body without difficulty.

Three orgasms later temporarily satiated lovers and future parents were sitting in companionable
silence in Artri’s bedroom. It was all quiet and peaceful. And probably too good to be true because the male had to ruin it all with one most idiotic question. Like it was not enough what they shared.

“Will you ever love me?” He asked with longing in his eyes.
“I…” she stammered trying to keep an eye contact with the man. She didn’t expect such a forward question.
“I cannot tell,” she said which was closest to truth statement, she could give. (Can’t you tell by yourself? Her insides were screaming.)

But he had to misinterpret what he saw. Poor idiot. He can suffer for being that stupid. He was set on making difficult what could be so easy. She would be his, body and soul, from the beginning if only was treated like a human being, not some kind of wild animal to tame and train brutally to obey every whim of a cruel master, that foolish, whimsical, treacherous creature she was doomed to have feelings for.

No way she would confess it before him.
But even if she would be that careless he won’t believe her. He never believed her when she was telling the truth, unless some independent sources could reaffirm her statements. And in this case surely there weren’t any.

“I’m sorry for bothering you,” he said at last, resigned. “You must be really tired with your burden and all.”

“I’m tired of your silliness,” she wanted to say but relented. “I think I am,” she mumbled instead kissing him good night.
Chapter Summary

Featuring quite a naughty scene between Artri, Vivianne and the guard named Thad.

After that night things between Vien and her master looked slightly better. Artri stopped to a avoid her and they were taking much more than before. She took the trouble to show him some small displays of affection here and there. Artri probably thought it was to bribe him for better treatment, when her pregnancy won’t shield her anymore against abuse, but she let him think whatever he liked.

Nothing changed in the way his staff was treating their mistress though. They subjected her to the same strict regime as before. One day the guard stepped into her bedroom for the daily inspection. It happened she was there with Artri, kneeling collared and naked between his legs pleasuring the master with the skilled mouth of hers. Her big belly in both hands and buttocks jutting out. She didn’t stop when the man entered so Artri started the conversation with stunned employee.

“What do you want, Thad?” he asked seemingly undeterred. When the boy answered, stammering, Artri patted lightly his slave’s bulging cheek.

“Well, darling, are you hiding something forbidden in your room?” He inquired with a soft tone.

“You will save him a lot of trouble if you tell us.”

Vien stopped bobbing her fallow head and wiped her mouth with the back of the hand.

“Nothing I know of, my lord,” she said with a noticeably hoarse voice, eying Thad with a half smile on her slightly swollen lips.

“You’ve heard her, boy,” Artri smiled too.

“The man surely should trust the mother of his offspring. Am I right, my pot-bellied Squirrel?”

“Yes, master,” Vien nodded. “You’re always right, unless you aren’t.” She burst into a fit of laughter.

“Oh, shut up, woman,” Artri faked annoyance. “Better return to your duties. Now.”

Vivianne obediently swallowed him again and looked up at her lover, seeking his guidance. She wasn’t paying attention to the guard anymore.

Thad backed off red as a cherry.

When they were done with this and Artri was returning the favour the scientist said, sounding very proud of himself.

“Poor Thad, now he knows even better than before to whom his crash belongs.”

“Natti, come on. Do you try to imply you were jealous because of a young boy like him? Your own employee, of all people?”

“I’m jealous of everyone who touches my property without permission. Don’t deny you liked him! That day at Merrivers you were looking at him fondly. Was his joke that hilarious?”
Vien jerked involuntarily when his teasing tongue moved over her most sensitive spot. “You remember this?” She gasped. “It was more than a year ago as I recall.” She lifted her torso on bent elbows, realising that even in this position she sees only the top of his black head from behind the cover provided by her inflated belly. Jaye was apparently enjoying himself, judging from the incessant undulating of his temporary abode.

“Oh, so you remember that too. I’d like to know why. That joke had to be exceptionally funny.”

“I don’t remember what he was saying but I remember you, how you looked at me, like it was the crime worthy of beheading. For talking with him in a very civilized manner, with four witnesses present, your personal friends included. And,” she added. “It was the day I have met Bini and Vai for the first time.”

“Yea, and what of it?” He asked nonchalantly, abandoning his ministrations.

“Oh, but you know... Master. Natti, please, that girl is innocent. I worry about her.”

“Does it mean you don’t trust my word?” In no time indulgent lover transformed himself into strict authoritarian, demanding nothing less than perfect obedience from his men and women.

“I do,” she tried to mollify him. “But she’s there all alone…”

“She’s not alone. I have left permanent staff on Perennis and since we left your Bini is serving them with their manly needs and otherwise. For this she’s fed and dressed. It’s a better life than she would have in the slave house. I will release her and send wherever you choose after your performance will meet my expectations.”

“And these are?” She asked holding her breath.

“Why, carrying the baby to full term and deliver him, healthy, in the purely natural way. And it means without the hint of painkillers.”

“And if I fail?” She swallowed, dreading the answer.

“You won’t, baby. Failure is not the option for you.” He smiled and then stood up throwing to Vien her abandoned clothes. “I have enough for now,” he said. “Get dressed.”

It was an order. Groaning silently she dragged herself from the bed reaching for the dress. When she donned it it was obvious, the clothing is a little too tight in the middle. “What the hell is that?” she exclaimed. “It was perfectly okay in the morning!”

Artri was watching his slave with a critical eye. “It seems you need a new wardrobe for your final weeks is all. But don’t worry, Squirrel, they can be used many times more after this, you know, with our future babies.”
“How are you feeling?” Sara asked eyeing her very huge friend. “You look exhausted.”

“And I feel exactly like that,” Vivianne answered trying to adjust her heavy, ceremonial collar which was crashing the back of her neck. It was the symbol of belonging, Artri said, and therefore she couldn’t avoid to wear it during the ceremony, another grisly XY Zone ritual he liked to observe. Like presenting her naked once was not enough.

Now she will tell her vow of eternal surrender and get the tattoo on her lower back with her owner’s name. It would mean he will hold the power over his slave till her death. It also means he can’t sell her or send her away on a whim, the only way to part will be by killing her with his own hands. Vien decided to do it for the sake of little Jaye. It gave her additional guarantee they will not part her with him. It was certainly worthy another public humiliation. She loved her froglet so much and was ready to do anything to improve her chances to take part in raising him.

All the promises Artri gave her before were rendered null and void because of the suicide she dared to attempt so Vien had to be grateful for giving her the second chance.

And she was too tired to really care. These are just words and tattoo may always be removed without the trace. So why bother. She was more concerned with her impending labour than this pathetic Makantaran nonsense. Because the ceremony was of pure Makantaran origin. On Galdanede giving the slave her owner’s family last name was enough to bind her with it for life. Makantarans wanted more than that.

Artri, that possessive bastard, wanted more than that. Like letting the others to hear her saying that stupid vow to him could change anything in their strained relationship. She would never thought the man that influential, famous and universally adored may be that insecure with the helpless woman, being already in his might.

“In fact, I feel and look like shit,” she said disgustedly.

Sara tried to turn her sour admittance to some kind of joke.

“You’re lucky your fiancé haven’t heard what you said.”

“My language is of least concern,” Vien shook her fallow head. “I want it done, is all. My froglet is squirming and stretching out inside me constantly and I feel nauseous since early morning. I hope not to puke in the middle of that bloody ceremony of his. Believe me, I really feel like...”

“Oh, okay!” Sara raised her hands in a soothing gesture. “But don’t you want to postpone it, perhaps. I can go to your master and tell him. Did your doctors allow it at all?”

“Yes, of course,” Vien sighed. “They are good men but know better than make irate the man who can end their careers anytime he wants.”

“And even Percy? He’s not the coward for sure,” Sara inquired.

“I haven’t told you yet. Percy was fired from his position as my main medic. He was arguing with him too much about what he can or can’t do with me. And nobody tells Artri Nathoo Kennert how to treat his woman, pregnant or not. Not even old family friend. I was asking him to reconsider, on my knees, no less, but he turned his back on me and told me it’s not my business because it’s him who pays them for their services, not me.”
“What a bastard!” Sally could not hide her annoyance hearing this.

“Yea,” Vivianne agreed. “And all of it for the lack of one word he so desperately craves to hear, but surely won’t, behaving like that.”

“Don’t you think…?” Sara tried.

“No,” was Vivianne’s only answer.
And soon two fully armed guards appeared in the dressing room. They were to escort their thirty-seven weeks pregnant mistress to the hall where the ceremony was about to begin. She wasn’t naked this time but her short dress was close to translucent and didn’t hide much of her mercilessly deformed body. With her posture collar and heavy ruby bellybutton ring she felt uncomfortable. Vien could only hope she won’t give birth prematurely in the hall.
“Oh, my sweet froglet!” Vivianne sighed internally while walking through the corridor, leading to the main hall. Heavily pregnant slave was flanked by two, neurowhips holding guards. They were here only for the show. Boys weren’t helping her, rather opposite. Tall men set the tempo much too fast for their, already sweating, charge.

“I hope, you won’t treat your women like that,” she continued her inner monologue, because it was distracting her a little from the weird situation she found herself in.

“I intend to teach you that, so you won’t be like your idiot father, pushing around, only for his perverse pleasure, the girl close to giving birth.”

It wasn’t the walk of shame for Vien. Christine, and later also Rhea, were always telling her it’s never the victim but their abusers, who should be ashamed of what they are doing.

But it wasn’t comfortable too. It couldn’t be, to pass all those sumptuously dressed, healthy people watching her misery. She was wondering involuntarily which of these women were pleasuring her beautiful master in the last weeks when she could not serve him in the usual way.

Vien was sure he had lovers on a side. it was obvious. But when she was asking him about this, Artri was only smiling and telling her that looking at his pregnant lover alone is thousand times better than unrestricted sexual activities with any other females. How could Vien believe that?

She also wondered when exactly she started to feel jealous. Vien tried to rationalize, she had to be, because other women might plot against her, endangering Vivianne’s position and the level of the influence she could have without their interfering. But it was all self-deception. Pathetic attempt to deny the fact she was drowning deeper and deeper with each passing day.

And here he was. In best clothes, eyes and hair shining and at his side ceremonial neurowhip with adornment matching the one of her collar. In fact, he needed nothing of the sort to torment her effectively.

The men escorting her led Vien to broad kneeling bench. Here they took off her shoes and helped the slave to lower herself on its hard, metal surface. Because of her delicate condition Vien expected at least small pillow, not to bruise her naked knees, but she found nothing of the sort. There they restrained her, attaching the ankles to the lower and wrists to the upper surface of the bench. It left the girl in the forced position with bent back and pregnant belly partly hanging down.

“Endure this,” she told herself. “It won’t last forever, will soon be over.” And so she raised her head to meet the green gaze of her lord. It was the breach of the protocol but Artri didn’t look surprised, or angry. The master of the ceremony ignored her insolence too. Only Vari sent her warning look but about that twat she didn’t care in the slightest.

Master of ceremony was aging Makantaran, probably one of Varian and Artri’s acquaintances. His helper was a younger man, standing behind him, ready to make the tattoo on her back and waiting for the sign to begin.

“We have gathered there to be witnesses in the process of binding that woman to her master, according to Makantaran law and custom. As all can see she was blessed already with his seed which is the best prognosis for her future service. We wish it to be long and fruitful. Now the slave will receive the sign of her owner.”
Officiant’s helper approached Vien from behind. The guard bared her back up to the collar and was keeping the hem of her dress up while younger Makantaran placed in the middle of her dorsal region the apparatus for engraving brands.

It was pre-programmed before the ceremony so it started to hum and vibrate at once, slowly and meticulously injecting the paint under her skin. It wasn’t exactly painful. More like tickling and stinging a little. She was far more concerned with her hardening belly. Most probably it was out of stress but she didn’t like it.

She had some Braxton-Hicks contractions before and hoped it was only them. She really didn’t want to go into labour now. Why the hell Artri waited that long with this nonsense? If he wanted it that much he could organise the event soon after they returned to Galdanede. But no, the fiend probably planned it that way to maximize her humiliation and discomfort.

When the apparatus spewed all the paint that was needed its operator took it away. The small of her back had been washed with disinfectant and shown to those of the gathered people who were standing in proximity. They took some pictures. It was time for the second part, demanding Vivianne’s active participation. Her damned belly was now hard as stone and she considered warning Artri about it. Luckily before master of ceremony begin anew, it softened progressively. The physicist however had to watch her closely because he leaned for the while in officiant’s direction whispering something to him. The man nodded giving Vien inquisitive look.

“Now, say your vows, child,” he said in the soft tone.

“I Vivianne Tray of Free Argossynian Planet State being pregnant with you, Artri Nathoo Kennert of Makantara and Galdanede, ask you with full conviction to keep me at your side for the rest of my days so we could raise our children together. I promise to be the best partner as I can, funny, witty and however you like me. Will you grant me that privilege, Artri Nathoo?”

It was worthy all the money to see faces of Vari and old Makantaran. They weren’t the words she had to learn according to Makantaran law. But they were too subservient and degrading to say for born free Argossynian, so she preferred her own. Maybe not that grand and solemn but simple and sincere.

Artri’s smile told her she has chosen properly. “It’s okay,” he said to the master of ceremony. “Let her be. Poor child forgot what to say. But it is enough for me.”

He came to Vien, kissed her on the mouth and said. “I have accepted your plea, Vivianne Tray Kennert.”
“How could you let her humiliate you publicly? Pregnant, or not, you should spank her for this!” Varian was fuming. It was predictable.

“Vari, calm down. Everyone thinks it was exceptionally sweet. And me too. I think Viv meant what she was saying. Isn’t it most important?”

“What she showed surely means she hasn’t the hint of respect for you. Asking you with your names only, without single honorific used? How dare that treacherous bitch to address her lord like that?”

“Varian! I warn you it’s the first and last time today you offended with your filthy tongue the mother of my child. The next you will be escorted to the gate of the estate immediately.”

Varian looked at him wounded Artri prefers Argossynian bitch over his most loving father. Art had no illusions about what Vari really thinks even if he will promise to abstain from voicing it loud. And he almost feared what would happen if Vari knew about the poisoning attempt of his now humble and obedient slave.

Leaving Varian to socialize with other guests the physicist went to visit Vivianne. After short presence in the party she retired to her comfortable rooms. Pregnant girl was visibly exhausted, so he allowed that.

When Artri entered she was already undressed, her collar taken off. The girl was standing with her back turned to the door so she was thinking it’s Leandra coming.

“Can you hand me that green dressing gown, if you please Lea,” she asked politely, stretching herself a little. She was always polite and nice to the servants.

“Believe me, darling you don’t need it, not yet,” he said, revealing his presence. She has spun abruptly.

“You’re scaring us, master, sneaking like that,” she said.

“Oh, so you’re not happy to see me, you prefer Lea,” Artri teased.

“Please, master, spare me further humiliation. You know I’m not in the best of shapes.”

Delicate features of his beloved seemed slightly timid and all her joints were swollen. Her shapely, even if unusually big, belly, he so loved to touch and kiss, was hanging low. She was close to giving birth.

“Oh, sweetling, you cannot bear me the child and not change,” he said, coming closer, enough to fill his nostrils with her delicious smells.

“But who said it’s the change for worse. Not me.” His lips have touched Vivianne’s neck tracing still visible imprint of the ceremonial collar.

“Please don’t,” she tried to stop him but it was too late. He has lifted her chin and dived among her puffy lips, his tongue demanding and hungry. After initial reluctance Vien soon gave up any
pretence of the resistance letting him lead her wherever he wanted.

“And you still don’t believe me I think you are most desirable female in all habitable space? There’s no other who could give me anything remotely close to what I feel for you.”

“You can be such sweet liar sometimes, master,” she said looking him in the eyes. “No way anyone could find this attractive.”

“I’m not just anyone,” Artri smiled. “I’m me and it happens I love it and not as the means to an end. You should know that.”

To prove his words, he kissed her again, first neck, then shoulder blades and after that Artri kneeled behind Vien, licking his freshly engraved initials on the small of her back. Embracing the slave he felt every small movement of their child and shivers coming through his mother’s rich, fragrant body. Doctors forbidden them penetrative sex lately but at least he could make her feel good with his tongue, to forget, for the short while, the responsibilities waiting soon for them both. “Can you go on your hands and knees, baby?” He suggested.

“I don’t know,” she shivered again. “What if Lea comes?”

“Let’s go to my room then, nobody would disturb us there.”

“What about your guests?”

“They will wait. Let Vari entertain them.” And not waiting for the answer Artri scooped most precious burden in his arms carrying it far from prying eyes and dutiful servants.
Chapter Summary

Vivianne's froglet makes his first appearance.

Guests were gathering slowly. It will take time for the first child of their first lady to appear in the outside world.

For Vien it was the great relief to have women beside her. The girl was afraid she will have to go through this in strictly male company of the medics, Artri and some of his guards. It could not be any female though, because as Galdanedian custom demanded, it allowed only mothers to keep her company in the birthing chamber. So it happened she could count on Nelly, Lea and Rissa to be beside her. Kari couldn’t come, because one of her granddaughters was close to delivery, so the elderly woman had stayed with her. She sent only congratulations and good wishes. Belle and Sara were excluded from the venerable assembly because of obvious reasons and had to wait outside with the rest of the gathered guests.

There was no need to keep the bunch of doctors in place. Ian and Varney would suffice. More were waiting for the call in case of any complications.

For her ordeal Vivianne was already undressed if not counting the collar she had to wear through the whole procedure. Luckily it was made of soft leather. In case she would prefer to stay silent through heaviest part of her pains, various gags were prepared and also special piece of carved wood to bite during contractions Makantaran style.

Now she was walking around the birthing chamber to ease the opening of her womb. Bare feet of suffering slave were making subsequent circles. So far she let out only a few muffled moans. If the girl was afraid she didn’t show it at all, calm and resigned even if her face was scrunching passingly when the contractions felt stronger.

During most of that long part Artri was absent, entertaining his guests, receiving congratulations and taking from them the bets for how long it will take. The winner who will predict the time closest to the real result was to receive a special award. He was informed how the situation develops and was ready to return if they needed him.

He was eventually summoned when her waters broke.

After next few hours of suffering the foetus was still relatively high in birthing channel and was moving excruciatingly slow. It was to be predicted because the boy was big, in fact dangerously close to physiological limits of his young mother’s anatomy.

To ease the passing of the baby they gave her the medicine, loosening her interpubic symphysis even more than it happens naturally. It affected heavily the rest of her joints too, giving labouring girl additional source of discomfort, especially in her back but practically everywhere else.

For the last part there were leather bands for her to hold while standing or kneeling or crouching. She could choose whatever position she wanted. And in the end she realised the last option feels most comfortable and effective for her. So they positioned her on a kind of dais for doctors to watch the progress of labour more easily than straight on the ground.
At one point Rissa asked Vien if she wants to try the biting stick. “It helps much when you grip your jaws on it while you are to push. I was using this almost every time if only they let me.”

Vivianne nodded appreciatively because she had nothing to lose trying.

Before taking the piece of wood from Riadisan girl Artri kissed his slave deeply and tenderly and only then placed it between her teeth securing the thing behind her head with the elastic band tied to its ends.

It was stinging terribly, her skin from all the sweat and birthing channel out of stretch and the relentless pressure of a child’s head on its tissues.

Biting the wood helped at the beginning but soon it wasn’t enough. Artri noticed her discomfort and said. “You can quit with it if you wish. Maybe you would prefer to scream.”

“You are the pervert,” she huffed, offended. “I can’t. Besides, they will all hear…” she stopped, gritting her teeth again during the next contraction.

The scientist waited until it passed and said. “They won’t. The room is soundproof. Just think about it.”

Vien only shook her fallow head but the longer it lasted the more her master’s proposition was tempting.

The moment came she wanted it out. To lose all inhibitions and end it at last. To stop being calm, distinguished, collected. To voice all her pain and suffering and also the anger and fury because her child will be born from the slave, not a free woman as she would wish so dearly. So screaming she was, and it helped her a lot.

Vivianne was barely conscious when Artri led by Varney’s instructions stretched carefully her slit to accommodate the roof of a baby’s skull pushing on it. And it was him who expertly supervised birthing of its arms and soon the rest of small, blood covered body slipped from his exhausted mother’s insides.

The baby boy wasn’t crying. He didn’t need to. The room was warm, and he was still joined with his parent by the umbilical cord. They were to wait until it stops pulsating completely. Newly minted mother and her newborn were moved to the more comfortable, temporary location and Vien could hold the child not yet parted with her fully.

“Froglet,” she whispered. “You’re here, I can’t believe it.”
Mistakes & Regrets

“I’m sorry for leaving you alone soon after so hard the labour but I had to be sure everything is all right with our wonderful baby,” Artri said after returning from the room where the baby was cleaned and examined.

“And?” Vien forgot about everything else, wanting to hear about what her master already knew.

“At first the little one seemed entirely healthy but then he had the seizure.”

“What?” Vivianne’s heart almost stopped after hearing the news.

“Apparently your attempt at killing him left lasting damage on his tiny self.”

“Nathoo, I didn’t…”

“You tried to kill him and yourself. It’s the fact. And we both know it perfectly well. We have summoned the best neonatologists to take rid of whatever it is. I believe our baby will be okay soon. But you know what I should do now? The same my father had done to my unfaithful mother. Sell you for the highest bidding. I know Thorstein Volterra was seriously interested in your service as his family’s potential womb. Owned by the man like him you would soon know the difference between indulgent and cruel, the unfeeling master. But I can’t do this, not only because of the ceremony we came through before his birth. I think the worst mother is better than none, so you won’t be banned from his surroundings. It’s my gift for you for giving me what I craved for the most and for choosing to stay with me.”

When Artri left her again View could not stop crying.

When they returned with the baby, she was still sobbing quietly, unable to find peace, after what she had heard. It felt terribly to know how much she endangered him.

Seeing Vien in this miserable state Artri mellowed at once.

“It’s okay,” he said. “The situation is under control now. I’m sorry for being harsh with you in the beginning. It’s because I was worrying about the sweetest thing’s well-being. I know I shouldn’t tell any of those things. Please forgive me and let’s forget it.”

Vien nodded, listening half-heartedly to what her master was saying. Because now he was playing oh-so-concerned father and partner, but what happened was his fault in equal measure. This man’s lies, half-truths and manipulations led her to the state in which double suicide seemed the only way to escape from the terrible situation. And now she was successfully branded and her son was the hostage of the XY Zone for ever.

“I’ve said, it’s okay,” Artri repeated. “I’ll go to ask for something to improve your mood but in the meantime do you want to hold him?”

He had no right to look that perfect. He had no right to smile. He had no right to be the winner.

“What is it?” At least he noticed something was wrong. “Are you in pain?” Artri asked worried. “Just tell me because we can get rid of it now, you know.”

What a good master he was! Why she couldn’t just hate him like before.

“No, it’s okay,” she choked out. “Just give me my baby. I want to stay with him alone. We have much to talk about.”
“Viv, you know we can’t leave you alone with Jaye,” her owner objected. “And no, it’s not because I don’t trust you. It’s just, you can faint or something.”

Vien only sighed. “But you have cameras here, you can watch us through them if you wish. Only for a while. I need it, Natti, please!”

“Okay, Leandra, give your mistress her baby.”

Lea, holding close squirming bundle in her arms, approached her lady’s bed. Woman’s gaze was judgemental and posture stiff, like she didn’t like the order Artri gave her and was obeying it only out of shear duty.

Vien didn’t mind. “Thank you, Lee,” she sent Leandra radiant smile through the tears, just to spite her.

The moment little Jaye was placed in her embrace again the world stopped to exist. There was only the tiny creature, still wearing clear signs of its prolonged, arduous arrival.

In the corner of her eye she saw Artri, crowding Lea to the entrance but didn’t pay attention.

“First things first, I think you need feeding,” she whispered to Jaye. Like she was taught to do Vien gently patted the boy’s cheek with her nipple. When his adorable toothless jaws opened, she placed it between them.

“You’re pure genius already,” she said with awe, watching him sucking.

“I guess you never tried this and yet, I can swear you’re doing it perfectly.”

After his first meal the nursling didn’t fall asleep. He seemed to watch her with his sapphire eyes from under the mop of black hair. There was no escape from the fact he was his father’s child.

Vien dried her tears. For his sake she must be strong. She has to do her best to please her owner, so he will never think about a replacement.

“I’m so, so sorry for what I have done,” she whispered to the tiny ear. “It was most stupid idea for getting rid with the problem. I was not myself from grief and fears. Apparently I have proved I’m not adult enough to be the mother. But you must tolerate me, silly as I am, because you won’t have another. I’m sure they will cure you from the results of my folly if they haven’t done it yet. I swear I will never hurt you, or myself, again. When you will be older and able to understand I’ll ask you for forgiveness but now let me love you as deeply as you deserve.”

She wanted to tell him far more than that but soon the baby yawned and before his mother could realize he was already sleeping. Vivianne joined him after a few minutes, tired of crying, worrying and still very recent effort of giving birth.
“What are you!?” Vien almost jumped when someone wanted to steal her greatest treasure.

“Easy, easy,” she heard the soft voice of the master. “I’m only taking him to change the diaper. Judging by the smell it’s very needed operation.”

Vivianne’s eyes opened wide this time. 
“You will be…”

“Cleaning our son’s tiny butt? Yes. You don’t expect me to summon servants or bots for every little thing to do around him. Now, do you?” He smirked, satisfied with himself.

Vien said nothing. She sat in a more upright position to look. And, man, Artri knew what he was doing.

“I’ve been practicing,” he explained, seeing her disbelieving gaze. “Taking care of newborns in birthing houses after helping to deliver them. I keep in low esteem men who only know how to put their babies into their partners wombs and have no slightest idea what to do to take them back when the time comes.”

“And this is why you knew what to do when I…”

“Exactly. You were accusing me earlier of cheating on you during the times of my absences. I didn’t want to reveal the truth about them for the time being because I wanted so much to surprise you with my new skills.”

“And you did!” Vien exclaimed.

“Only to ruin everything with my big mouth soon after,” Artri smiled sadly.

“No, no, it was understandable. I… you had every right to be angry at me. Being you I would surely be! I have deserved the scolding I got and more.”

Artri looked at her vigilantly but said nothing, finishing cleaning the newborn, dressing him anew and putting sleepy thing to the crib.

“Now it’s time for you, little mother. Come, I’ll take you to the shower,” he urged.

“But I am cleaned already.” Vien protested. She didn’t want him to see her bleeding, with disfigured belly and temporary excess of the skin.

“It was many hours ago, sweetling. Personal hygiene is very important for the woman after delivery. Don’t be afraid. I will be most gentle servant of yours. What is it, baby? You surely aren’t afraid of me?”

Parents

Chapter Summary

Artri being creepy. And nice. But probably more creepy.
“I, no,” she stammered, “but I don’t want you to see me yet. You may not like what you’ll see.”

“Oh, come on. You cannot mean it. I love all of you, every inch of you and in whatever state you are. Don’t deny me your closeness, I need to hold you so much. Come, please.”

Truth be told Artri sounded genuine and desperate. She had to indulge him if he so wished. For Jaye.

So eventually the girl relented, throwing the blanket to the side and sitting on the edge of the bed.

“Such pretty and brave girl you are,” he smiled embracing Vien and helping her to reach the bathroom.

“I know you are sore around your intimate parts and for a few days will continue to be, so I’ll be extraordinarily gentle. Come, we will take it all off.”

With the nightgown off he touched reverently her spotted breasts and wrinkled belly.

At first she flinched a little feeling helpless and vulnerable.

“Don’t be afraid,” Artri said, noticing her anxiety. “I won’t hurt you. See, you look fantastic. Nothing at all to be ashamed of. It’s purely natural thing. Now when we have the child together you’ve got me as your eternal slave and servant.”

The male’s green eyes seemed darker now. Obsessed and demanding. It was an obsession to be used, so Vivianne showed no sign of discomfort she was still feeling, letting him to wash her whole with pleasantly warm water and fruity lotion.

She thanked him for the care with the kiss, chaste and delicate. The gesture was received with the enthusiasm matching at least the one he would show being elected the ruler of the whole XY Zone.
Trapped

A few weeks later.

“Please doctor, can you tell my master I’m not ready yet to enter his bed?” Vivianne looked at Varney with pleading eyes.

“To enter his bed?” Her doctor smiled. “As far as I know you are sleeping together since the first day after your firstborn’s delivery.”

“You know what I mean, sir. I’m not ready yet to receive my lord. He, he’s not so small and I…” she blushed furiously. Discussing her owner’s anatomy wasn’t the thing she had been used to on a daily basis. Especially with another man.

“After delivery you are even better suited to serve him,” Varney said. The smile disappeared from his lips. “And serving you will be. I can’t lie to your master, child. To tell him you are yet unfit for sexual intercourse I should show him why it’s like that. You know he’s present during every examination of you or your baby and is no stranger to obstetrics now. Mr. Kennert has learned a lot when you were expecting, so he won’t believe any confabulation I could come with. I can’t help you. And I’m not sorry about that at all. Believe me, your master knows what’s the best for his slave.”

“But I don’t feel that well,” she tried from the different perspective.

“It’s subjective feeling with no anatomical or physiological reasons. I won’t support your cause, girl. What you’re asking for is close to treason. As presented mistress it’s your duty to care about your lord’s intimate needs. Denying him your body, when it can be offered without harm, may be punished severely. You’re plain ungrateful for everything he has done for you. For how good he is and caring. I rarely saw men that invested into their family wellbeing, that faithful and loving. It would be cruel and unnecessary to make him wait more than is really needed. Now go and try to be a better slave for the lord of yours. And don’t forget about the exercises I have prescribed for you to make you better prepared for resuming your duties.”

“When you’ll finish to nurse, I want to see you in my cabinet,” Artri said more serious than he was since long.

“Varney informed me you tried to negotiate with him postponement of your entrance ceremony. Is it true you don’t want me?” He asked when Vivianne was standing before him half an hour after her summoning.

“No, it’s not like that,” she exclaimed. “I want to be yours again but if…”

“And instead asking your owner you went to the other man, to make him lie for your sake?”

“Natti, I didn’t…”

“Be silent, girl. I haven’t finished talking yet. What you made is the grave insolence. And insubordination of the worst kind. You were discussing intimate family matters with a virtual stranger
which is strictly forbidden. It’s my duty as your owner and caretaker to teach you better manners than that. Luckily your body has regenerated itself after delivery, enough to receive suitable punishment."

So to the basement they went. She was tied to the bench and her back and buttocks whipped. Just like that.

“Is everything all right?” He asked helping her to stand.

“Yes, my lord. I’m okay,” Vien answered straightening herself with the groan.

“Good. And now, what do we say?”

“I thank you for your efforts to teach me the proper behaviour, sir.”

Atri nodded appreciatively. “It’s not that grand pleasure to punish nursing mother but I must do certain things no matter if anyone likes it or not.”

The experience was far more humiliating than exactly painful. Apparently it was mostly for the show and most tender aftercare followed the punishment.

Despite the latter it was the clear signal for Vivianne she’s not untouchable even after she became the mother. It was the bitter lesson, but she has learned it well. Or so she thought that day.
Don't Panic

Little Jaye was growing fast on his mother’s rich milk. The seizure that happened in the first hours of his independent life never returned. His brain was throughly examined and the medics have found nothing even remotely worrying. The boy would stay under constant medical surveillance for some time but everything seemed to suggest, it was purely solitary event, with no further consequences.

When it all became known, Artri apologized to Vien once more, for his harsh words and unjustified accusations, regarding their son’s endangered health.

It was an enormous relief to know she’s not guilty of his sufferings so her self esteem has raised, but surely not to the extent she was comfortable enough, to ask her wielder to have separate beds, at least for some time.

After Jaye’s birth Artri demanded for them both to live with him together in the master’s apartments. Partly it was good because he acted as skilled and careful nurse for the newborn and his mother when Vien was still weak after her struggles.

But when Vivianne got stronger, she was ready to be more self contained as a parent. And she craved intimate time only with her baby. Unfortunately Artri could not understand that need. For him it was utmost cruelty to ban him from the equation.

At first she presumed he will get bored after a few days and will return to his work and colleagues, but nothing like that happened. The physicist was too deeply infatuated with the duo to leave them for more than a few hours and much less for the night. When well fed baby was put into the crib, his father never had enough of cuddling, kissing and whispering with his slave.

Sometimes it seemed to Vien, the girl had two children simultaneously under her care. She tried to reason with herself Artri needs her too. He was without a permanent partner for most of his adult life and without the mother as the baby, so it shouldn’t be surprising, he craved for her presence and tender touches.

But sometimes the fact, she almost never could be alone, grated on her nerves and his constant demands for close contact felt near suffocating.

She couldn’t even confess how she feels about it to anyone, because people, even her female friends, would surely look at her like she was crazy. In the universe where most females were constantly tortured, maimed, killed or at best neglected, how could she complain her beautiful master is... too caring. Nobody would understand.

And now he was preparing private ceremony for them, to be even closer and to claim his Argossynian hostage anew. Vien, remembering very well what she had promised to her newborn son, didn’t intend to make any difficulty with this after her earlier attempts ended so unpleasantly. She was now resigned to fulfill her duty without the fuss and with a serene face.

That evening she has nursed her son and left some milk for later for Lea to give him when he will wake up hungry.

After this she went to take the quick shower. She couldn’t keep her longing master waiting.

The clothes were already prepared, long dress made of white lace with matching collar but without boots or underwear. Exactly as the custom demanded.

Artri was waiting for her in the corridor leading to his rooms.
“I’m sorry for being late but your son is hungrier every day, and each feeding lasts longer.”

“Well, being Jaye, I wouldn’t like to be separated at all with so shapely breast. Clever little brat knows what’s the best.” Artri smiled knowingly tracing the outline of her nipple under the lace.

Once such a touch would make her shiver with delicious anticipation but now she barely felt anything. Maybe she was just tired, her belly despite multiple efforts was far from the ideal she would want it to be. But when she asked for some additional means to return it to its previous shape Artri scolded her, like seriously scolded, for being vain and selfish. He said distended abdomen, with it’s fading, but still visible stretch marks, is every fertile woman’s badge of honour, so she should carry hers proudly. Besides, he added, there’s no need to keep it flat like before because sooner or later, but better sooner, it will grow again to accommodate the next offspring of her owner.

Natural look suits her the most, he said, and the fewer additional interventions the better. Her youth is the best adornment, and she needs no other.

And so now he would have her, exactly like he liked it.

“You look so sad,” Artri noticed. “And shy, I’m almost missing my little rebel.”

The black-haired deity leaned over Vien and his gorgeous lips touched her neck. This time she shivered. But not from pleasure. She was too nervous to relax. Her thoughts were racing. How can she satisfy spoiled beauty of the man in her current state? Her hair has lost its glorious shine, her pussy was still loose and dry and silhouette far from perfect. She felt miserable and pitifully inadequate for the goal placed before her.

“Ivvi, are you with me?” Artri looked at a slave girl with sympathy and a little worry. But it was even worse if he would be outwardly bossy and demanding. She didn’t want his pity. It was so, so humiliating.

“I,” she started and stopped abruptly realising what she wanted to say.

“Okay.” Artri stepped back and extended only his hand. “Let’s come and try the supper. And if you won’t feel comfortable enough, we can also end with it, take Jaye from Lea’s care and just go to sleep. Does it sound acceptable?”

“You need not make allowances for me, master,” she said, suddenly determined. “When I am here, I can as well fulfill my obligations!”

“Obligations, duties. What else? Is it what I am for you, the duty?” His face fell as if someone hit him.

It was not the way it should be heading.

Before Vien had the time to think what to say, or do, Artri sent her strained smile. “No, darling, you miss the meaning of our intimate, private ceremony. Maybe I should tell you before but I hoped it would come naturally. The whole thing, as I understand it, is all about you, not me. It’s honouring you after one of the greatest achievements female creature can make. I know they warped it and turned into it’s almost complete antithesis through the centuries after Great Divide, buy initial idea was just that. And the only person who should worry about the outcome is me. It’s me who has to satisfy you, not the other way around. So don’t be nervous, if something will be not right it may be only the fault of your master.”

It all sounded so nice and sweet but something didn’t fit in his elegant explanation.

“If so,” she said, “then why I was punished for…”
“Oh, this,” he sighed. “It wasn’t because you wanted to postpone our special meeting but because you tried to involve the third party in what should be only our mutual, exclusive agreement. Luckily Varney is a discrete man but not all people are exactly like him. Now you understand?”

“Yes, master,” Vien said, accepting at last his hand.
Artri being the monster in disguise again.

“I’m not frigid,” Vivianne cried, hiding her red face among the pillows.
“Of course you’re not. Please, don’t say such things.” Artri tried to comfort her, but it was futile.
“You weren’t in the mood…”
“And now you will surely go to another,” she sobbed.

In different circumstances Artri would feel the perverse pleasure, knowing the source of Vivianne’s anxiety, but now seeing her in despair was the heartbreaking experience.

Everything began so well. After initial reservations she realised Artri doesn’t plan to hurt her or judge her harshly in the case of failure and quickly warmed up to him. She was such a sensitive, beautiful child and her fresh maternity only added to her charms making the young woman astonishing mixture of exceptionally strong and surprisingly vulnerable.

It was beyond him how she could think she’s unattractive. But it most probably originated from his own faults. Delayed effect of punishing her too eagerly for the conversation with Varney and not paying enough attention to her girly problems, she tried to share with him, only to be scolded, accused of vanity and laughed at. It wouldn’t cost him much but Vien would be happier. It was better to indulge her strategically with such trinkets to have his way in more vital things like planning her next pregnancy for example. Because Jaye needed brothers, that was obvious, Artri knew.

It was true, doctors advised him to wait at least the whole year with the attempt to impregnate Vien anew. But they also tried to convince him earlier, her pregnancy with Jaye should be ended through cesarean, that the boy is far too big to be delivered safely in a natural way by so delicate the mother and after troubled last weeks of her third trimester.

And they were wrong. She proved to be not that delicate creature. Additional relaxing of her joints added to her sufferings during contractions but she lived through them. When they knew the cesarean is not the option he can accept, medics wanted him to consider using at least mild painkillers, to ease the experience for the girl, to not discourage her from giving birth to more children. But it was non-negotiable. No way he could rob his girl and himself from full and raw experience of medically unaided birth.

And it was him who was right, demanding as little medical intervention as possible. Plus undiminished suffering surely made her love Jaye even more than he initially thought possible. She had to live through her ordeal feeling every single second. Just as mother nature made her daughters able to feel.

So their evening rolled on pleasantly. Vien, who at first stated, she won’t be eating or drinking anything, soon found her lost appetite, as it could be expected with the nursing mother.

During supper they were discussing some random things. Then they even joked. Vien responded well to his attempts to enlighten the mood. It seemed she was enjoying herself in Artri’s adoring company.
The next step was asking the girl to sit on his lap and let herself be fed. She complied, giggling and teasing him for his eagerness to please her. Soon they kissed and tasted each other, tentatively at first and with more and more zeal thereafter. So, naturally, the logical next phase was moving to bed. And there the problem appeared.

Vivianne without the warning stiffened in his embrace, breaking out of it subsequently. She said she can’t and that he would surely hate her for being unresponsive.

Artri tried to convince the slave to wait and see how it will go. At first she let him take that pretty dress off and caress her gorgeous, perfect body. She was just laying still for a few minutes trying to find her pleasure. In vain. Suddenly she sat upright and cried. So much for their wonderful evening.

“It’s okay,” Artri said after she could calm herself a little. “I can understand you’re not ready yet. It’s a natural thing. You are most probably too much invested in that other Kennert. I guess he needs you more than I do. It’s no problem. We won’t tell anyone what really happened.”

“Thank you,” she smiled through bitter tears.

“No problem, really. We must wait an hour or two and I’ll go to bring us Jaye.” Artri sent her comforting smile.

Much later when she was sleeping already, cradled protectively around the small body of five weeks old the scientist suddenly realised there are things far more important, and satisfying, than sex and domination.
Leandra

When Vien woke up the next day she was alone in the room. Before the girl could start to worry Lea appeared with Jaye in her arms.
“I have bathed him,” she said. “Poor thing was sweating in his sleep.”

“Okay, thank you,” Vien said, gathering pillows around her to make herself comfortable. Without the word the servant approached to hand the baby to his waiting mother.

Little boy immediately started to search for her breast. She was feeding him two or three times in the night but obviously he was hungry again. Soon he found what he was looking for and adorable sounds of sucking and swallowing filled the bedroom.

“I've said, thank you,” Vivianne stressed looking at Leandra still lingering around her bed.

“I would like to apologize, mistress,” she said.

“Oh, really,” Vien felt sceptical about that sudden confession. “You have nothing to apologise for. I'm satisfied with your service. You can go now. I'll call for you when you'll be needed, Leandra.”

“Of course, mistress, but may I say something before?”

“If you have to,” Vivianne was intrigued but faked annoyance and impatience.

“I'm sorry for judging you unjustly. I thought you were manipulative, evil woman, unworthy…”

“Enough,” Vivianne spat. “I don't need any additional evaluation from you, much less when I'm feeding my baby. I need peace for it not some stupid babbling of overconfident maidservant.”

For Lea it was like slap in the face. She only curtsied and fled without the further word.

It took only a few seconds for Vivianne to realise what she has just done.

“Oh, no, I have promised myself never to behave like Francescas of this world,” she thought to herself.

“See, Froglet, how silly your stupid mother sometimes can act!” She said to Jaye. “I have lashed out at your poor aunt Lea, and what for? Because of my own faults. She was just honest with me and I…

When you will grow up sweetie, you will take privileged position in your world and until that time you should learn how to treat human beings, standing formally beneath you. Certainly not like I have just shown you. After we finish we must go to her to apologize for the untoward behaviour. And, besides, in fact all people are born as equals, it's only some societies that qualify them as not. Your father will probably tell you the same, even if, well… “

“This world is extremely complicated,” she said after the while. “But you're yet too small to understand. Luckily we have time, our whole lives.” Vivianne smiled, and kissed small fingers. She never thought being mother will come to her that naturally and without slightest effort, of course with single exception of birthing itself. She never planned children before capturing by XY Zone slavers but now would never exchange her little froglet for anything else, even for freedom. Of course to be free and his mother would be most preferable arrangement but it was too late to back off from the path she has chosen.

Jaye, after putting him from one breast to the other a few times, at last had enough. She waited for
the baby to burp and went to wash herself. It didn't escape her notice she wasn't under usual surveillance anymore. Somewhere inbetween her master started to trust her again. He had to be sure than, she won't do anything to harm any of them. And Artri was hundred percent right, she could never do this. Vien was now completely reconciled to her fate and if she had any doubts left she has buried them deep, ready to forget things that once put her at odds with her baby's father.

Lea probably didn't expect to see the mistress of the house so quickly after sharp reprimand she was given from the other woman.

“Are you after breakfast or before?” Vien asked, like anything unpleasant never happened between them.

“I'm not hungry, mistress,” Lea faltered.

“No?” Vivianne laughed like a child she never quite ceased to be. “Because I'm always hungry. Voracious in fact. Can you take care of my treasure when I'll be ruining my master's household budget?”

“Of course, mistress,” Lea answered stiffly, “and you don't need to ask. I'm here to fulfill your every request without unnecessary discussion.”

“Okay,” Vien nodded. “If it is so indeed, my next disposition for you is to keep me company with the glass of juice, if you're really not hungry. So sit and be my guest, Leandra.”

“As my mistress commands,” Lea sighed but complied, holding Jaye on one arm while patting him on his little back. Vien easily noticed her delight because of keeping the baby and smiled inwardly. She has prepared breakfast for herself and beverages for them both. After feeding her first hunger Vivianne spoke again.

“Lea, I must ask you about something very important,” she said.

“And what is it my lady?” Leandra's gaze turned surprisingly soft in the span of seconds.

“You see,” Vien began hesitantly, “I cannot tell what may happen to me in the future. But in case I could not take care of Jaye one day, would you look after him when I will be no more?”

“What are you talking about?” Lea would jump if not for the boy in her embrace. “Nothing will happen to you. You're most guarded and protected woman in whole habitable space. There's no need to torture yourself with such thoughts.”

“But will you?” Vivianne looked her in the eyes, pleading.

“Of course. How can you doubt it? I love him like my own child. But nothing will happen to you, believe me.”

“Of this we can't be sure and that's why I had to ask. Thank you, Lea. I only wish we could be friends again like before he was conceived. What a pity you will never want me as one.”

“Why do you think so?” Lea lifted herself in her chair.

“Well, I was extremely rude today. There's no way you may ever like such brash and arrogant mistress!”

“Oh, no, it was me who started talking to you in completely unacceptable way. Nothing strange I made you angry. Forgive me mistress, it will never happen again.”
“Okay,” Vivianne smiled. “I will forgive you, but only when you'll start to address me with my name again and forgive me in turn my terrible lack of manners.”

“I…, yes, there's nothing to forgive…”

They stood up from the table and hugged themselves with squirming infant between them. It was exactly the moment master of the house entered the hall returning from his morning exercises.

“Is there something I should know about?” he smirked, seeing two women in close embrace.

“These were just girly affairs,” laughed Vivianne letting go of Leandra and running to greet her owner. She climbed on her toes to place not so chaste kiss on his sweet mouth.

“The whole night apparently was not enough,” he laughed too, keeping up appearances in front of the servant and giving Vien clear sign their little secret is safe in his keeping.
Let Me Talk

Her periods reappeared when Jaye was five months old. It was early, regarding the fact she was nursing him intensely, also in the night. When the little boy’s belly was full Vivianne’s master usually was putting him to the crib to have his mother only for himself. Her libido was well and good, perfect in fact. Initial failure of the evening never repeated itself and she was enjoying her lover’s possessiveness throughout. Until the first bleeding happened, that is.

Vien confessed about this before the master and asked for the implant or something else to avoid certain unwanted event. To her utmost surprise he denied her any means of contraception.

“No way,” he said, deadly serious. “It’s a clear sign your body is ready for the second child, and that you will have, as soon as mother nature lets it happen.”

“That joke isn’t funny at all,” she fumed, looking at him disbelievingly.

“It’s not a joke, madame,” Artri answered undisturbed by her anxiety. “Our son needs brothers. He can’t be alone and without the support of his siblings, as I always was. You are still young and healthy and there’s no better time, for the woman, to have children when in her twenties.”

“No way. It’s too early. My son is much too young to be anyone’s older brother! And if you won’t grant me what I want, I wish for separate bedrooms.”

“You think you can negotiate? If so, you’re wrong.” Artri said keeping his perfectly calm demeanour.

“But you promised…”

“My past promises, as you know well, ceased to apply when you made an attempt at taking your own life. So stop resisting me, because being docile fits your sweet personality much better.”

There was no further discussion. Vien had to comply if she didn’t want to be separated with Jaye. So the girl swallowed another humiliation and never dared to deny her body to the owner. She was sometimes crying out of anger and helplessness but only in the dark and when alone, so no one could see it. Outwardly she was fully submitted to her owner’s wishes.

After such demonstration of absolute supremacy, Artri was again exceptionally good for his slave, caring about all needs either of Vivianne or their baby. They lacked for nothing including constant emotional support.

Encouraged by this Vivianne decided to try with her cause once more.

“You know, Froglet,” one day she said to Jaye, who was listening carefully as always, with his blue-eyed gaze glued to her features.

“Your father is not entirely evil man. I’m sure he’s working very hard on improving his behaviour despite genetic burden he carries. The problem is, people rarely denied him anything, if ever. Everyone always tried to befriend with him or stay in his good graces and because of it flattered him enormously. Even his own father seems to worship the ground he’s walking on and you perfectly know your grandpa is not of the submissive kind. Surely I have made the huge mistake going to Natti, demanding something, instead of asking him about how he himself feels about it. Maybe if I start again, in a different tone than the last time, it’s possible he won’t be that cross. I’m willing to try, I have nothing to lose. I owe you and us at least that.”

That said Vivianne left her son in Leandra’s care and headed to her master’s apartments.
Unfortunately Artri was not alone. There were Tommy Fisher and, what was far worse, Reni Cray in his cabinet, discussing something.

“I’m sorry,” she stammered, unpleasantly surprised. She didn’t know when boys arrived, being most probably far too absorbed with childcare to notice what’s happening around.

“Didn’t want to disturb,” Vien mumbled ready to back off. If it was Tommy alone, she could manage but with Reni it was too tough to even try. She must wait until her master won’t be busy.

“Oh, no, you’re never disturbing,” Artri sent her the sympathetic smile.

“What is it, little mother that brought your pretty self here?”

In the public Artri was often indifferent or even outwardly cold to her. The reason behind it was keeping up the appearance of ruthless slave owner in front of the wide audience. For their future goals It was vital to not irk or provoke unnecessarily all the blockheads and people from the center of political stage. Vien agreed with that strategy wholeheartedly playing from her side humble and thoroughly subordinate being. But with her master’s personal friends it was a tad bit different. With them he wasn’t hiding that much, it was far more than simple master-slave relationship.

“It can wait, my lord,” she said, keeping her gaze low, “until you won’t be busy. I... apologize again.”

Vien was one leg already behind the door when Artri’s commanding voice stopped her.

“Wait, darling. I haven’t let you go yet.”

She gritted her teeth and turned toward the gathered assembly.

The black-maned was soon beside her.

“I’m afraid we have to end our meeting prematurely,” he said to his colleagues. “You know those nursing mothers. I can’t irritate mine lest my son would have a colic!”

“I can’t believe it, you let her feed your child like that!” Reni grumbled while shaking his long brown hair like in desperation. It was pure acting and very much in Warren’s usual style, but Artri Kennert was not amused this time.

“Reni, dear boy,” he spat in the young man’s direction, “could you check perhaps if you aren’t accidentally in the garden?”

The answer provoked the fit of giggles from Tommy Fisher. The blond extended his hand toward Cray.

“Come,” he said. “As you can see, we have been dismissed for now.”

Reni gave Tommy milk curdling look and marched out of the room ignoring him completely.

“See you in the evening I guess,” Fisher said. “Or can we wait until you’ll finish?”

“How long will it take, Squirrel?” Artri asked Vien.

“I don’t know, master,” she answered feeling the touch of his hands on her waist, covered as usual only by the loose fitting and rather thin dress. “It depends only on you, my sweetest.”

“You’ve heard her, brother,” Artri smiled, apparently elated with Vivianne’s little flattery.

“I’ll call you when I’ll be free,” he promised.

“Okay, see you later than,” Tommy said bowing slightly and followed Reni without a further delay. Vien was now alone with her master.
“You didn’t need to shoo away your friends, master,” Vivianne said, trying not to squirm or shiver under Artri’s insistent touch. Not that it was unpleasant. If only it would be safe to let him move further Vien could enjoy the contact.

“No problem,” Kennert giggled. “I’m their coordinator and they have to comply to whatever I say. If anyone doesn’t like your owner enough to listen to him, belonging to the group is not a duty but the privilege which can be taken from such uncooperative brat anytime. But you didn’t come to hear me talking about my colleagues, am I right?”

“Exactly.” Vien exclaimed maybe a little too loud but was absolved from her naughty behaviour because in that moment the same hands found their way under slave’s skirts. It was her fault obviously because Vivianne has chosen knee long dress and without underwear in the way reaching successfully to her privates was exceptionally easy.

“Master, please,” she gasped.
“Please what? Please, continue or please, stop?” He whispered to her hot ear.
“How nice you’re already wet, darling,” he said not waiting for the answer and putting an opposite arm around her ribcage. It wasn’t at all what she planned but couldn’t afford to say no to his advances. Vivianne moaned involuntarily when Artri took off his fingers from her hole only to slap young mother’s pink round buttocks a few times until they reddened.

“What was it for?” he asked.
“For coming unasked, not checking before if I can.”
“Yes, and?”
“Showing my knees without my master’s consent to men who are not my doctors or his employees.”
“And?”
“I don’t know!”
“Think better.” Artri slapped her again.
“I’ve said I don’t know!” Vien groaned.
“So I will tell you. For an attempt at flattery.”
“No,” Vivianne wriggled in his hold. “It was genuine!”
“Oh really? In that case for arguing with the master.”
“But I didn’t!”
“Now you did. I can always discipline my slave in advance.”
“You pervert!” She burst with laughter.
Having Artri in such a playful, teasing mode was a good sign, so she relaxed a little. Maybe Vien had the chance this time.

“You are the real treasure,” the scientist said turning her to stand face to face with him. “I can’t
imagine how the life was without you and our little one. Empty. You are everything I longed for and more.”

Yes, it was exactly that moment, so Vivianne took the risk.

“I’m glad you value my presence and whatever skills I have,” she said. “I’m trying as best as I can but… sometimes I think I may do things slightly different from the custom here…”

No, it wasn’t exactly what Vien wanted to say but his green gaze made her losing the plot and forgetting the words prepared earlier. Seeing her confusion Artri tried to help.

“You came here to ask for something, am I right? It’s a good thing, because you almost never ask about anything. Only Vai was like this. The others had no reservations to voice their demands. So, how can I be of service to my pretty hostage?”

“I would like to return to the subject of our expected parenthood,” she choked out at last.

“Did you come here to tell me, perhaps…” his features brightened in a split second.

“No, no, it’s not that,” Vien blushed. “Rather opposite. I would like you to reconsider your orders regarding my... fertility, my lord,” Vien looked at the black-haired male with pleading eyes, ready to back off anytime at the slightest signs of anger or annoyance in pretty eyes of her owner.

“I see,” Artri sighed. “Okay, let’s sit. If you really have to talk about it, I cannot silence you forever. You’re playing your chosen role so perfectly I often forget you weren’t raised to obey blindly anyone’s orders.” He released Vien from his embraces.

“I can sit on your lap, master, if you only let me.” She offered.

Being close, Vivianne knew, had its major advantages. Luckily Artri complied. Soon he surely would feel his slave’s hammering heart and slight fidgeting caused by the wipeout, her rear end just received. It should make him feeling both in control and protective. She knew now how to play her putative weakness. It wasn’t instinctual like with her XY Zone raised sisters. Vien had to use it consciously, results though were not that different.

“This time it worked even before she could say or do anything.

“Please, don’t be afraid, it’s still valid what I’ve said about our son’s colic,” he joked good heartedly. “I’m only barking but rarely biting nowadays.”

Physicist’s confession induced small smile appearing on her lips. Artri could be sweet when he wanted.

“Okay,” she nodded. “I only wanted to tell you, why I behaved the way I did that morning. I didn’t want to rebel for the sake of refusing to do my duty. It’s not because I’m afraid of any pregnancy burdens, ailings or difficulties. After our sweet little angel of the boy I know they are worthy to come through. I want to bring him siblings but for his sake alone I think we should wait with it a bit longer.”

Artri didn’t interrupt, so the slave continued.

“I know what you’ve said, we can employ as many nurses and caretakers as we want, to help us with children. But their efforts, however perfect they may be, can’t amount to personal care provided by parents alone. You, of all the people, should know the difference!”

“So what does my wise and considerate partner suggest?” Artri looked like genuinely moved by her words.
“I want him to have a younger sibling but at least when he will know what’s happening and why he has to share his mother with new voracious alien creature.”
“Okay, baby,” the man sighed again. “You have convinced me to your views in the matter.”

“I…, what?” Her eyes were rounded with astonishment.

“You have convinced me,” Artri repeated like it was the most natural thing. “I’ll go tomorrow to my doctor to change the meds I’m taking.”

When returned to Jaye Vien was literally squealing with delight. “We’ve made it,” she said to her son. “We will have each other, exclusively, and nobody will interfere for now. I’m so, so happy, Froglet. See, I’ve told you your dad is not so bad a man!”
Garden Party

Vivianne’s triumph and respite were short lived because as early as two or three days after her important conversation with the master she experienced certain symptoms, well known to her partly from the first, partly from the second pregnancy.

She couldn’t be more broken than after discovering uneasy truth about her new condition. No way Vien would share the news with her owner. Not yet, she couldn’t bear his triumphant gaze after knocking out his slave again. Or maybe he knew before. Artri once mentioned he can detect by the changes of smell alone if a woman is with child. With Jaye and their lost firstborn it escaped his notice but now it may be different. Maybe the man knew, and that is why he agreed that easily to postpone their next parenthood. Because he was fully aware, it’s on the way already.

Vien counted the time and realised her son won’t be not much over fifteen months old when his younger sibling arrives. Such a small toddler yet. She couldn’t think about it without crying.

She apparently failed her sweetest froglet. She should go to Artri much earlier, should fight rather than meekly accept her fate, laying down and taking it. She’s just an in-calf cow, not the warrior.

“What’s wrong?” Artri asked seeing her absent gaze. “You forgot about the evening party? Because you’re not ready yet.”

“Ah, that stupid garden party of his,” she thought. Vien gladly would extricate herself from social duties but in such a case Artri can suspect something. Vivianne wasn’t ready yet to give him that certain satisfaction. So she only sighed.

“I didn’t,” the slave said, “but had no time so far. Our Froglet may be very absorbing sometimes.”

Artri scrunched his long aristocratic nose.

“Lea can put him to sleep,” he said. “It need not to be necessarily you all the time. Such a big boy can’t hang on your breast almost constantly, for two-thirds of night and a day at least.”

“But master, you let me manage these matters. And suddenly you want to interfere in what is…”

“Ohay, okay,” he momentarily gave up with arguing. “I’m sorry, it was rude and unnecessary. But you can’t blame me, girl, for being a little jealous for the extraordinary intimacy you both share.”

And then he came closer to steal the kiss from his exasperated personal slave.

“What do you think,” he inquired, releasing her, blushed and panting, “now when I’m no threat to you, about one fast quickie in my office?”

Artri kneaded her buttocks possessively. He could act so base sometimes. It was far too much.

“You should learn restraint, my lord,” she blurted. “And, besides, I have to change before the guests will arrive,” that said Vivianne marched from the hall with head held high and not sparing him the second glance.

In fact Vivianne was furious. Her insides were literally seething from anger when on the outside she tried to be nice and caring hostess for her master’s venerable and not so venerable guests.

Among the latter she spotted Warren Cray. Now in soft light of the lamps he looked ravishing. She could not deny that despite his insolence and terrible sense of humour the boy was indisputably handsome, with his perfect, even if slightly dark, complexion, shining brown eyes and wavy locks of the same colour. Besides, his charms didn’t know yet what regeneration means. Unlike much older
Artri Kennert the man was a hundred percent natural. No way he couldn’t notice sudden interest usually indifferent first lady has shown him. Soon young physicist drifted in proximity of his coordinator’s fallow-haired mistress.

It was enough for Vien to realize that maybe the occasion for revenge just presented itself before her. It would be the pure sin to not use it.
“Enjoying yourself, Mr. Cray?” Vivianne asked politely. It was weird to address formally someone that young. It was entirely different with Artri, who’s undisputable authority demanded respect from people of whatever gender. With Reni it sounded artificial and strained but she tried to sound natural and like the hostess, really caring about her guest having a good time.

“Well,” he said, “you may say that. As much as one can enjoy the party, who’s host robbed his guests from usual service. Does your master experience serious financial problems to save on hiring public slaves?”

“Not, that I know of, Mr. Cray,” Vien answered. Many men at that point would ask her to use their names or nicknames but Warren apparently liked it, when his coordinator’s woman was speaking to him with respectful terms. If this was what he wanted Vien had no problem with it.

“Being honest,” she added after the while, “even if he had any, I probably wouldn’t know. My master says matters like these aren’t by definition any slave’s business.”

“I see. This is so smart of him,” Reni smiled.

She looked at him flirtatiously.

“I will tell you in secret, it was me, who asked my lord to omit that part. It’s just because I’m uncomfortable with those things, especially after my punishment, which took place not very far from where we now stand. Oh, but maybe we can make it out for you somehow, I mean for the disappointment…”

“Do you offer yourself to every guest?” The man whispered conspiratorially.

“No,” she stated boldly, “Only to you, sir.”

“Is this how Kennert wants to check me? Are you in conspiracy with him? Surely you must be.”

“My master has nothing to do with it. I know he denied you entrance when you wanted to visit me among others…”

She saw the boy was definitely interested. To have sex with her was a long time obsession of his. Maybe because it was denied him, when the others were taking advantage of the opportunity.

“You want me fired? Or killed?” He snorted, faking indifference albeit clumsily.

“Nobody would know. Besides, I’m pregnant already so it’s a hundred percent safe. If you aren’t afraid please meet me at the entrance to the labyrinth after half an hour.”

With those words she left him, to mingle with other guests. It was too risky to talk with Reni any longer, lest someone will notice they socialize too much. Even if the night was warm Vivianne shivered with anticipation.

Reni was waiting for her where she had told him to be. Vien took him by the hand and led the man to her secret spot. It was dark there and far from the crowd.

“Why are you doing this?” Warren asked.

“Because I can,” she shrugged. "Besides, I’ll soon have another baby so it’s nice to have fun before
new duties will arrive. Don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone.”

It happened Reni was good at this stuff, but it was the act of defiance against her tyrannical master, that gave her most satisfaction. They had to be silent and could not discuss what took place among them ever after. Warren left the first and Vivianne followed him some twenty minutes later, adjusting her hair and dress on the way. Nobody noticed anything, neither the guests nor the guards.

It was Artri who found her as the first. Luckily, after parting with Reni she could take a quick shower in the house so he wasn’t able to sniff his rival’s smells on her body.

“Where have you been, insolent girl?” He asked, irritated. “Lea was looking for you.”

“Oh, I’m sorry, master, but I was dutifully entertaining your guests. I had to leave my communicator somewhere…” she babbled innocently. “Excuse me, my lord, I’ll check what she wanted with me. It had to be something with Jaye.”

Before Artri could stop her Vien slipped from his embrace and ran to her baby.
Misunderstandings

The symptoms Vivianne experienced disappeared almost miraculously and, if not the absence of the next bleeding, she could think she wasn’t pregnant. Vien still shied from telling her master but Artri could count well by himself, so eventually the moment came, he had noticed something must go on.

Instead of congratulations the scientist scolded his slave severely. “Why did you hide from me you can be expecting? This was irresponsible. I could have hurt him unknowingly!”

“Him?” She frowned, not moved at all by his agitation.

“Almost one hundred percent him. But gender doesn’t matter. We could hurt our child, helpless and innocent as they are, during our various activities.”

“It would be your fault, master. It’s you who has forbidden the use of any safe words.” she pointed.

“Another reason to tell me immediately when you suspected. Unless you wanted to endanger them intentionally. This would match well your recent behaviour. You didn’t want to have them at all.”

“Don’t twist my words,” she said. “I only didn’t want to be with child too soon and told you exactly that. But you didn’t want to listen. And when you resolved to change your mind at last it was too late already.”

“Why did you decide to stay with me, if you still hate me?” Artri sighed heavily.

Vien wanted to contradict him, but stopped before could open her mouth. What she has done with Reni didn’t speak of the great devotion to the man, standing now next to her. Besides, little Jaye, who was pure, innocent and never hurt her, has stolen big part of Vivianne heart and she wasn’t in so great the need to be in the throes of passion with his father.

“Nevermind,” he said. “What has been done is done and there’s no turning back. I’ll call Varney immediately. We cannot wait with checking if everything is all right. You can go now. I’ll call you when the doctor arrives.”

Vien was standing the moment longer like if wanting to add something more but not finding the right words she quickly relented and slipped out without the sound.

When Vivianne left Artri sighed again. He should call the medic at once but could not move just yet. He should feel elation, not impending breakdown. Things were looking progressively better lately. Vien seemed to settle at last and Artri spotted fairly many small signals, she was warming to him and their relationship on a far deeper level than before. The binding ceremony, despite Vivianne’s rather unusual choice of words, was the great success. The birthing party too, even if it had ended prematurely because of Jaye’s unexpected seizure attack. Luckily the little one was now healthy and safe so everything seemed to be well.

Or rather it should be well, if not his first response to the girl’s objections, regarding the use of her womb. Now he knew it was the huge mistake. One that can cost him dearly.
There was no way Vien could know how much he has modified his behaviour around her. By the standards of The XY Zone Artri was extremely indulging, understanding and liberal owner, leaving many important decisions in his slave’s hands. Especially ones, regarding the upbringing of their son. Initially Artri never imagined the young mother may want to feed him personally. In his spheres it was rare. Nelly was doing it too, but Art thought it was the exception, until his own lover followed her older friend’s footsteps. Usually mistress’s thing was to conceive, carry and deliver and return as early as possible to her master’s bed. If one didn’t want to give their babies synthesized milk wet nurses were employed. Artri could forget completely about the latter when it became obvious Vien won’t pass that duty to anyone else.

Duty or maybe rather privilege, she guarded so jealously. And Art soon found he has no heart to end forcefully her enthusiastic breastfeeding.

For Vien though, raised in the presence of diametrally different views, regarding relationships and cooperation between partners, no matter what he had done, she still deemed him the tyrant and heartless enforcer of his will.

Sometimes situation demanded the latter. When Artri knew he was right, he had to act just like that, but Vien, even if she was to agree never received it well. But whenever he could Artri was letting Vien to take part in the decision-making, even if he wasn’t used at all to discussing that many things with the slave who, according to his own way of upbringing, should just listen and obey.

He has changed much, he thought, and was still learning, yet, probably not as fast as he should, like the last case has shown. Artri could only hope Vivianne’s second pregnancy would mellow her more and their expectations will meet at last, somewhere in the middle.

Finally, Artri reluctantly reached for the communicator to inform Varney about the need for the urgent medical consultation.
“Everything is as it should be.” Varney smiled to them. “The embryo is properly settled and growing. Nothing to worry about. We won’t torment it yet for genetic examination, let it multiply its cells peacefully. I’ll set the term for taking samples soon. In the meantime Vivianne can wean her older son, because pregnancy alone will be enough of the burden for her delicate organism. No need to add lactation to it, especially if immunosuppressive meds would be needed to keep your slave’s promising condition intact. But about the latter we will see. And last but not least no rough sex for the time being.”

“Of course, doctor,” Artri smiled helping his mistress to leave examination chair. He patted lightly her stomach, not showing yet any signs of Vivianne’s condition. He wanted to take her to his room immediately to feed his senses with her presence, to look, touch, smell and taste her.

“I’m sorry for shouting at you earlier,” he said watching Vien feeding their baby. Their older baby, Artri had to remind himself. “I was just worried sick.”

“I know,” Vien looked at him from over the black head of the nursling. They agreed she can feed Jaye for the time being and wean him only when it will be strictly necessary. It was all he could do for her after ruining her own plans. Artri promised himself not to do such things anymore. She was feeling exceptionally well so maybe no immunosuppressants will be needed.

“You know, we have to choose more servants?” Artri reminded his mistress. “Lea won’t be able to look after everything. Maybe we could hire two maids in one go. What do your think?”

“I think one will be enough for now,” Vivianne answered. “I’m not expecting twins or other multiple birth so more wouldn’t be necessary.” She smiled weakly and there was no true joy in it.

“Okay, let it be as you wish, mistress,” Artri didn’t like to see her sad like that but there was nothing he could do with it now. “Speaking of which, I have set my eye on one very promising girl in the slave house. She’s of similar age with you or maybe slightly older. Her name is Heather. Do you like to meet her, perhaps? I can organise it whenever you agree.”

“Am I supposed to choose her?” Vien asked, stroking absentmindedly shining, soft locks of her son.

“What? No! Of course not, darling. You must feel comfortable with her. She will be yours even if I’m actual owner. I thought you may like her, but don’t have to comply.”

“Can’t I have Bini instead? I miss her.”

“I know,” Art nodded, “I could ask her through her new owner if she may be interested but I’m afraid he will order her to join your service again regardless if Bini wants it or not.”

“So why I can’t ask her personally?” Vivianne wanted to know.
“You could,” Artri said, “but it would be impolite to omit her rightful wielder.”

“Okay than,” Vien sighed, resigned. “I can meet that Heather girl of yours, master. Maybe you’re right and I will like her.”

Heather was beside herself with worry. The guard ordered her to prepare herself. Today Mr. Kennert was coming to visit Heath for the second time. Insanely handsome, Universe famous scientist was there before, chitchatting with her a little, asking about the name, age, ideas and preferences. She wasn’t told what was the meaning of such an unexpected interview. Mr. Kennert only smiled. He was even more charming and pretty when smiling. He said, she was a good girl and pleasant to converse with. And basically it was all. And now he was coming again. But what for? Heather had no idea.

Despite his endearing manners she inwardly knew men like him may be far more dangerous than they looked. Heather have heard already about the mystery surrounding the disappearance of his former slaves, so she could not exclude terrible possibility the male may look for another victim. It happened, and not that rarely, wealthy men were buying girls and women from the slave house only to kill them for pleasure after elaborate tortures. Could this be it?

Heather had no illusions about her own physical attractiveness. She wasn’t bad looking female but hardly to the extent the man like that one could be serious about her. Then again, taking her for one night wouldn’t demand visiting her two times before the event. So when Artri Kennert entered the cell Heather was puzzled and terrified in equal measure.

“Hi, kid,” he greeted her. “How are you doing?”

“I’m well, thank you, sir,” somehow she managed for her voice to not tremble.

“It’s good,” the man said, “because I have a proposition for you. I’m looking for the companion and helper for my mistress. She’s expecting our second child so we will soon need additional help. Are you interested? You must be frank with me. I will not order to punish you for refusing, if you don’t feel like it is the job for you.”

So it was that terrible secret revealed at last. Relief she felt was overwhelming

“Yes, I’m interested!” She exclaimed with unfeigned enthusiasm.

Mr. Kennert has brought a very nice dress for Heather to change into from her usual garb, before the first meeting with his mistress. Because, he warned, his was not the final decision. Heath can stay only when the mistress would like her enough. Mistress and her seven months old son.

Heather felt nervous before this decisive meeting.

To make matters worse, when they arrived Mr. Kennert had urgent business to attend, because of some unexpected call from one of his coworkers. He left her ordering to wait for his return, when she will be introduced to the mistress.

Heather obediently sat in the hall, richly decorated with various plants, most of them unknown to the girl.
When she was waiting someone else emerged from one entrance. It was a young woman, holding a beautiful dark-haired baby on her hip. She wasn’t excessively dressed and looked like every other ordinary girl so Heather presumed it’s one of the mistress’s servants taking care of her young son. Surely rearing the child wasn’t the lady’s of the house job. Mistress’s main goal was always to satisfy her master and giving him children but after that the former. Only poor men had one woman for all female jobs needed in the household and Mr. Kennert wasn’t one of such males.

The person soon noticed Heather’s presence because she turned from her way, wherever was heading, and approached the newcomer so Heather could inspect her now.

The girl had to be of similar age and height as Heather herself. She had a very pleasant, slightly round face, surrounded by long and straight fawn hair, not very thick but soft and apparently freshly washed. Her nose was shapely and of moderate size, lips rather narrow but of healthy cherry colour. Her eyes were cobalt blue and shaded by long brown lashes. Her perfectly shaped eyebrows were of the same colour. The stranger had a fair complexion marred only by the small herd of freckles gathered mainly around the base of her nose. The long neck of the girl was bare, the best proof she was only the servant.

Unknown woman smiled to her and Heather immediately was enchanted by the golden glow, she seemed to emit while doing it. And suddenly Heather desperately wanted to befriend with that woman, to stay close to her and get to know each other better. If only she could be accepted by the mistress of the house! Maybe the girl will tell her what to do to be admitted successfully to Mr Kennert’s household. Certainly she should know. She’s here after all and taking care of master’s and mistress’s firstborn, the best proof of their trust.
The girl sat on the bench next to Heather.  
“Hi,” she said, “I'm Vien, and here is the Froglet, or, more officially, Jaye Branford Kennert.” She moved the child from the hip the boy was carried on to her lap and, after securing him properly, extended her hand in the newcomer's direction.

“I'm Heather,” said Heather, shaking pale, long-fingered hand of the young woman. “Mr, Kennert has brought me here to meet with his mistress. I'd love to serve her. Do you think I have the chance to be accepted as her maidservant?”

At first the girl looked at Heather strangely but after the while she laughed, hiding her reddened face behind the black head of the boy, Jaye.

“I think you have the chance and a substantial one,” she said at last. “Don’t you agree, sweetling?”

“Da,” answered the boy.

“See, Froglet is positive too. Do you want to hold him for the while?”

“I'd love too,” Heather complied. In the slave house she and her colleagues had to learn how to take care of little ones in case someone would hire them for such a job one day. The fact this baby was the son of the most influential and well-known men should make her nervous but it didn’t. Jaye was calm, well-behaved child and beautiful. It was a great privilege and pleasure to hold him.

“Hello, young man,” she smiled to the black-haired boy. “Nice to meet you, you’re such a princeling already. So, do you really think I can convince your mother to let me stay?”

“Da da,” answered Jaye. Heather wasn’t sure if it’s acceptable but she couldn’t deny herself kissing his plump cheek.

“He’s adorable,” Heather admitted wanting to give the child back. “No, no,” Vien said, “I can see you like him, you can hold Jaye a little longer if you wish. I’ll rest a little in the meantime.”

In that moment little Jaye seemed suddenly interested in embroidery Heath’s dress had around the neckline. At first he was touching the stitches with his tiny fingers but after that grasped the nearest part of clothing, placing it whole in his salivating mouth. Soon he was munching and chewing on it with great delight.

“Oh, no,” Heather exclaimed theatricality. “It's the dress your daddy has given me to look good before your mother. And now, how I can see her in half of my clothes soaking wet?!”

“Don’t worry,” the other woman smiled again her sweet, innocent smile although there were small sparks of mischief in it too. “I can always give you one of mine. We are of similar built so it won’t be the problem. Besides, I think he may be hungry already. Please come with me, I’ll give you something to change and synthesize some little snack for him.

Heather wanted so much to go with the girl and was terribly disconcerted by the fact she couldn’t. “I’m sorry,” she sighed, “but Mr Kennert ordered me to stay here and wait for him.”

“It’s okay,” Vien patted her on the shoulder. “I’ll take him on me if any problems arise.”
The leisurely way the girl was talking about the man shocked Heather greatly.
“You will do what?” She choked.

“I may as well tell you. We are sleeping together,” the girl confessed. There was no pride in her words, just a simple matter-of-fact statement.

Heather wondered if they would demand it of her too if she will stay. She wasn’t sure how to feel about it, but decided to worry when the time comes, not earlier.

It wasn’t unheard of part of a servant’s duties was warming master’s bed. Sometimes men were choosing their mistresses mainly, if not solely, for representational purposes and children, without the hint of romantic reasons. In that case they were looking for that special warmth and intimacy elsewhere.

And then Heather reminded herself Mr Kennert’s mistress is pregnant. This has to be it. She must not feel well and therefore Vien works as her temporary replacement. Whatever reason for the arrangement the girl must stand relatively high in the household’s hierarchy therefore agreeing to her suggestion won’t do Heather any harm.

So she went.
Vien continues her unplanned incognito.

Vien has led Heather to the cozy little room with the view to the pond, surrounded by lush green reeds and many purple flowers in the peak of their bloom. Restricted for the long spans of time to almost empty cells and sterile corridors she longed for the greenery, nature and unrestricted skies. It hit her she would have them in abundance soon, if only… Heather didn’t want to be impolite to flood the servant girl with questions about her mysterious lady so she waited patiently until she finishes taking care of little Jaye’s needs.

Vien told her to keep the boy longer to let her prepare the meal for him, so when the other girl was busying herself with food synthesizer Heather was bouncing the baby on her knees and playing children’s silly games, she has learned, and to which Jaye responded enthusiastically.

In the meantime Vien has placed on the table variety of small bowls, filled with colorful vegetable pastes or soft pieces of veggies and fruits. When it was all ready, she took Jaye from Heather, put the boy into his chair and, after washing his hands, presented with all the food.

Heather spotted there was no trace of any cutlery around.
“You won’t be feeding him?” She asked surprised.

“No. Jaye is very talented in feeding himself. Little genius in that regard you may say. Most important thing is to not disturb his exploration of tastes and textures,” Vien answered.

As if to confirm her words, Jaye pulled out his plump hand to dip it in a bowl with orange ingredient. He took some among his fingers, which after a while happily put into his mouth. The greater part of the purée ended on his cheeks and some on the floor, but he licked with relish what was left and the boy reached for more.

“See,” Vien smiled. “It’s good exercise of muscle coordination and not only of it and for us the chance of peaceful time to talk. I can sense you have a lot of questions regarding your new post. Please don’t hesitate to inquire.”

Before Heath had the chance to open her mouth Vien suddenly jumped. Literally jumped from the seat she was occupying. Despite her expert dealing with the child in this gesture she seemed more like a little girl than a trusted servant in so opulent the house.

“Silly me,” she exclaimed, “I have promised you clothes to change and now keep you sitting in a wet dress, almost eaten by my… by my boy. Just keep an eye on him and I’ll bring a few to choose from.”

That said, she disappeared in what had to be the wardrobe.
Soon she returned with the armful of dresses of various cuts and colours.
“I forgot to ask about what your preferences are so I brought more just in case,” she explained depositing them on Heather’s lap.

“I thank you,” Heather nearly blushed after being the object of such exaggerated friendliness from
the woman she knew for not more than a full hour. She has chosen randomly unable to think about anything beside the obsessive need to stay near that most awesome person, possibly forever.

Vien shook her head. "No need to thank me, it’s all provided by the master of the house.”

“Oh, but those surely belong to you?”

“Nothing in this place belongs to me!” Vien said, her usual softness turned to something dangerously close to annoyance and anger. But it lasted only seconds. The girl quickly apologized for her untoward behaviour and soon smiled again that radiant smile of hers. The same which enchanted Heather at the beginning of their acquaintance, before they even had the chance to exchange any pleasantries.

After returning from the bathroom in a new dress Heather found more food on the table.

“I thought you may be hungry too,” Vien explained inviting Heather to sit.

“It’s very nice of you,” Heath sighed, “but I’m too nervous to eat anything before meeting the mistress.”

“You think her to be the monster?” Vien giggled.

“No, no, certainly not,” Heather assured the other woman, not quite sincerely. “But I can imagine the chosen one of such man may be haughty and hard to deal with. Besides Mr. Kennert told me she’s pregnant so in her current condition she may be even more whimsical and demanding. I don’t know if I’ll be able to meet her expectations for the perfect servant.”

“Perfect, perfect,” Vien shrugged. “Nobody’s perfect if you ask me. Mistress, concubine or servant, any of us doesn’t mean much in the men ruled world so we should at least show ourselves mutual respect. To show and to have it.”

Heather’s heart was beating wildly. It was almost too beautiful to be true.

“Is this what your mistress thinks?” She asked almost breathlessly.

“More or less, yes.” Vien smiled again.

“All you need to offer is to be loyal and to try your best. Nothing more is needed. Are you ready to promise her that?”

“I’d love to, but it depends on what kind of human she is. But if she has chosen you for the person caring of her child, she can’t be bad so, yes, I’m ready to promise.”

“Wow. It’s perfect answer,” Vien said. “I think she would like it very much. Actually, I’m sure about it. You have nothing to worry about. In fact…”

The appearance of a certain black-haired deity unexpectedly interrupted young woman’s speech.

“I see, you girls have befriended already. That’s good,” he said measuring them both with his green stare.
Chapter Summary

Something light and positive before the heavy angst will hit again.

Seeing the master of the house Heather wanted to get up immediately.
“There’s no need,” Mr Kennert said.

First, he approached his already very dirty son.
“Having lunch, I see,” he said to the boy kneeling beside his chair, carefully avoiding ingredients that landed there during little boy’s meal.

“Da da da da da,” answered Jaye and smiled to his father showing all his four teeth.
“Don’t you think daddy may be hungry too? Can you feed daddy, darling?”
Jaye looked at Artri thoughtfully.
“Give me something to eat, please!” The physicist asked loud and clear.

Hearing this, boy extended in his direction the hand, covered with something green he was consuming, and patted the man’s mouth with it.

“Good boy,” Artri praised him. Then licked little fingers one by one, pretending he enjoys the taste of vegetable purée very much and provoking the fit of happy giggles.

“Thank you, darling,” he kissed the child’s hand and washed it in the basin standing on the table. After that he left Jaye to his happy meal and turned to the women.

“I’m sorry for the delay,” he said, “but I haven’t seen him since early morning. So, how is it, sweetie?”
He aimed his last question toward Vien.

“It’s more than okay, my lord” the girl answered getting up. Artri moved closer to wrap the lock of Vien’s hair around his finger. With his other hand the man lifted her chin and placed the gentle kiss on the girl’s lips.
Now could be no slightest doubt these two were lovers. The chemistry was there. Heather felt it.

“That’s great, I’m glad,” Artri said, moving away from the young woman reluctantly. “And so, Heather, you can go with me now to discuss the conditions of your work.”

It sounded rather strange but Heather, even if a little confused, had to obey. So she let herself be led to the man’s spacious office, leaving Vien and Jaye behind.

“Forgive me, my lord,” when they were alone together Heather gathered her courage at last, “but you’ve told me I’m to meet the mistress yet, before the arrangement may be finalized.”

Mr Kennert’s features lightened up immediately. “Oh, but you’ve met her already,” he smiled. “How come you didn’t know?”

Heather covered her mouth in shame. “It’s… it’s only my fault, sir,” she stammered. “I thought she’s
only the servant and talked to her like that and she… I mean the mistress didn’t tell me I was wrong.”

“Mm, that’s very like her,” Mr. Kennert agreed. “That girl can be such incurable prankster sometimes if she wants it. And it’s one of those things that make her so amazing. Surely you will never be bored with the mistress like that.”

“I guess not,” she mumbled, still so very much ashamed by her stupid faux pas. She should know better, not letting herself be led astray by the outward appearances. What does it say about her qualities as the person and candidate for the servant?

Mr Kennert saw Heather’s confusion and offered her his support.
“Don’t worry that much,” he said. “Most important thing is she has accepted you. I hope you will never break her trust, the rest is not so important.”

What he told her was strangely similar in its meaning and intentions to former Vien’s words.

“I understand, my lord,” Heather nodded, a little more confident now. “And thank you.”
Time for genetic analysis of the embryo came at last. Vien was sure it will be all right. With two older predecessors of this baby without the curse prognostics were more than optimistic, so she tried not to be nervous. Until something unexpected happened.

“Mr Kennert, may I ask you to go with me for the while?” Varney asked with the tone that alarmed Vien. Something was not right. Apparently with the baby.

“I want to hear it too,” she tried to sound firm, even if it wasn’t that easy when in restraints and with lower part of her body naked.

“Later,” the doc said like if scolding her for unrealistic expectations. “Just wait here while I’m talking to your master.”

“Natti,” she tried again, desperate. “At least free me from these restraints, so I could go to the restroom.”

“You’ve heard the doctor? Later!” Artri said, placing the basin under her.

“You can use it if you really can’t wait.” Apparently he wanted to hear what Varney has to say and immediately.

“But Nathoo,” she groaned but in vain. The doors have already closed behind the males.

When they opened again Artri was alone.

“Nathoo, what is it?” She was nearly crazy from worry. “What is it, tell me, please. Is he dead?”

“Oh no, it lives, I may say... unfortunately,” Kennert said with a stony face.

“What do you mean?” Her voice was shaking.

“First it’s not he but that would not be the issue at all. The problem is, it’s not my child. Can you explain how it happened?”

His unnatural calmness was far more terrifying than any fit of anger. There was no point in hiding anything. It couldn’t be worse than it already was.

“Can I get out of this before?” Vien asked ready for refusal but Kennert complied miraculously.

“Of course,” he said. “Varney wanted to keep you on examination chair, because he thought I would like to end your pregnancy immediately, but I have told him to leave us for now. He will keep the secret. Varney knows very well what could happen to him if he didn’t. And nobody beside our threesome should ever know about it. Luckily it’s a girl, so she belongs to me and I may do with her whatever pleases me.”

That last statement made her hair to stand on the ends in horror. But she has hidden her fears as much she could. He was still talking to her so not everything was lost. Situation was critical but not hopeless. Artri had certain feelings for her. Maybe that’s why she was now with him not in the lonely prison cell

“Thank you,” Vien said adjusting her dress. She was grateful Artri didn’t want her to confess while half naked.

“Well, I’m listening,” he urged.

“Sure. She’s…. She must be Cray’s,” the slave stammered. It was a different thing to use young scientist for her revenge in the dark bushes of Cycad’s Valley and different to talk about it before her
master in the harsh lights of an infirmary.

“You’re kidding me?!” Artri burst with nervous laughter. “Warren, of all men on Galdanede available for you? I thought you hate each other!”

“I… he was the first one I met, who was willing to give me, what I wanted at the moment…”

“The first one? So there were more? How many?”

“No, no, it was only your Reni, and only once.”

“Holy Infinity, why, you felt that unsatiated or what?”

“It was a few days after our conversation, when I have asked you to delay your procreational plans. You have agreed, but I soon discovered… no, now I know it was only a false belief, that I was pregnant already. And I was devastated and angry and…”

“And decided to fuck my coworker, whom you didn’t even like, to have your revenge on me for what you thought was making you pregnant. Instead of coming to me to check your condition together you had unprotected sex with that kid. Just great. Were you even thinking about our son when doing it?”

“I’m sorry,” Vien said. “I was sure it would be safe. Now I know it was stupid. Will you ever forgive me?”

“When we will get rid of the obstacle and you’ll start to behave as a good slave should, then maybe. You can return to your baby. You’re lucky I can’t imagine him to lose his mother at such an early age because he needs you, most unfortunately. Now I want you out of my sight.”

For Vien there was nothing left but to comply.
Chapter Summary

Artri wallowing in self pity. Misogyny, derogatory language and unhealthy coping mechanisms, like very unhealthy.

Filthy Argossynian whore! His father was right. Nothing good can come from the planet where women roam free without supervision and do whatever they want. He has trusted her, and she deceived him again. But it will soon end. This time for good. No new chances for the slut. She will pay for this with her body until it will be able to serve him.

Artri would never think the woman that coddled, honoured and cared for may do something as base as that? Varian has told the truth, implying Artri had hurt poor creature, showing her unrealistic picture of their world. He was also right, saying she would not survive two weeks, behaving like that with another man. But Artri could not think about getting rid of the treacherous wench.

It was not true, what he said about Jaye. Lea or Rissa would make perfect foster mothers for the boy, much better than spoiled Argossynian. His son would miss Vien for some time severely, that’s undisputable, but was small enough to move his deepest affection to another person, loving him and taking care of him and forget about his unfaithful mother.

Artri could not even dream about it. It was most humiliating part of that hellish puzzle. He was stuck. Addicted. It’s how getting out for so long without a permanent partner ends like, most probably. Even now, knowing what he knew, Artri longed for her presence. If not that fucking bastard in her belly, Reni’s child, no less, he would summon Vivianne immediately. She seemed to be the only cure for the sickness caused by her own doings.

What Vien has done was careless and irresponsible. What if someone could catch them during their illegal activities? There would be a huge scandal again, his innocent child stigmatized and Artri compromised, this time forever.

There was only one explanation for this. She felt nothing toward him. Stayed with Artri to save the universe and to serve her Argossynian ideals. For the girl he was only a means to an end. She never cared for him one bit. And never will. Nobody hurt him that deeply, maybe only his biological mother by abandoning him soon after birth. But she will pay dearly for this. He will see to that.

Only severe physical pain could lessen his sufferings. Unfortunately, Tommy wasn’t able to come but he always could summon one of his boys. Yes, Thad would be the best. The boy can think he takes revenge for what once happened to his beloved first lady. Artri will gladly let him.

Thaddeus looked scared when Artri ordered him to appear with a certain neurowhip.
“Is it necessary?” The guard asked. “I’m sure none of the women deserves to be contacted with the means of punishment like this.”
“Did I tell you it’s for any of the girls?” Artri scowled. “And since when you can question your orders, boy? Haven’t you read your contract yet?”
“I’m sorry, Mr Kennert, but I don’t understand.”
“You don’t need to. Just listen. I want you to use it on me. With full power. Until I tell you to stop. I guess it’s simple enough.”
“Yes, Mr Kennert,” Thad agreed but his tone lacked conviction. Despite all the hesitation luckily he could do what Artri asked him for.

The pain was blinding and Artri barely managed to not scream. The kid probably saw it and was asking him a few times if it’s not enough but Artri insisted to go on. Until he was close to passing out at last which he did as soon as Thaddeus left.
When Artri regained full consciousness it was late evening already. His back was still pulsating with lingering pain but at least he wasn't feverish. Impulses were powerful but the whipping didn't leave any lasting scars. Art could not afford to be ill or temporarily disabled, especially now. Besides he didn't want to show Vien how hard the news about her infidelity have shook him.

Circumstances decidedly demanded she should spend the night in his apartments as always, lest her girls can start to suspect something. It was vital to keep the secret restricted to its initial wielders until the danger of the exposure could be safely neutralised. Artri already had an idea when and where it should be done.

When the physicist reached women's chambers Vien was still feeding Jaye, who was just starting to fall asleep. Her girls were with their mistress so Artri came closer and before speaking kissed her on the forehead, like it was his custom after a few hours of not seeing each other.

“Come to bed,” he said to the slave girl. “It's time.”

At first she looked at Art disbelievingly but apparently was intelligent enough to understand why he's doing it.

“Yes, of course,” Vien whispered.
Carefully she took the breast out of the baby's mouth and handed their son to his father. Jaye went to Art willingly, clinging hard to him.

“You missed daddy, didn't you?” Artri smiled patting little boy's back delicately.
“So, good night, girls,” he said to Lea and Heather and left the room holding the baby and crowding their mother before them.

“You can sleep here,” Artri informed the girl when they reached the bedroom. I'll take one of adjacent rooms. You can always call me if you'll need anything through the night.”

Vien taking Jaye from Art looked at him sadly.
“You don't need to run away from me, master. This bed is big enough for us not to touch when you don't want to.”
“I'm sorry,” he said, “but I don't intend to share it with you until you'll be clean from the aftermath of your indecent behaviour”

“Wha... what does it mean?” She asked, fearful.

“We will discuss it soon but not in the presence of our son. When he will be already sleeping I'll tell you everything you need to know. And one more thing. Tomorrow we will leave for Perennis.”

Lea and Heather knew better than to ask why they all must move to Galdanedian moon. Only Vien was informed about the true purpose of the change. The girl didn't try to protest though. She was
keeping up appearances before her servants as was ordered to do.

Their Perennian home welcomed them with flowering pristerines and impeccably cleaned rooms. Everything was ready for the arrival of Kennert's family. In new surroundings weaning Jaye went not so bad as Artri feared. The boy wasn't satisfied with the change of course but soon learned to drink synthesised milk from the cup. Vivianne recompensed him lack of her breast with double amount of cuddling, kissing and singing of Argossynian children songs. Now he didn't need her as much as before and Artri was ready to summon Varney.

When Artri told Vien about the imminent arrival of the doctor her calm demeanour suddenly crumbled. She started to beg him to reconsider but Artri was implacable.

“Believe me it's the mercy what I'm just doing. For you and for her. You can't bore Reni’s child. One day someone would know who's she is and could be able to use it against us. You have endangered my position enough one time as it was. You can't smash it to pieces only because you wanted to fuck my coworker to spite your master.”

“Nathoo!”

“It's the best possible outcome for us all. We have agreed to this already. She'll be just put to sleep. You don't want her to suffer, do you? It's pure selfishness you show, now denying her easy and clean departure. It's much better than living in constant danger and become the prey in the end to the ones like Volterra or Haldane.

“Or you,” Vivianne thought. It was always like this. She could have her choices but only if they were exactly the same as his wishes. Vien knew she has to comply eventually. Artri had her son, her girls were in his might too. She could not afford to have her own separate word in this. “So, can you promise me my little girl won't suffer?” she croaked, whole body shaking. His arms surrounded her in warm embrace. “Of course darling. I'm not that cruel to make the innocent being feel any unnecessary pain. You can be sure of that. And you won't feel it too. There's enough of stress in the fact alone. We can make it in full anaesthesia so you won't remember a thing.”

“No, I want to feel it. I want to know.”

“Of course, if you so wish but it's really unnecessary.” Artri was embracing her again and his lips were on Vivianne's neck. Why can't she stop loving such a monster. And yet she knew she will do anything to please cruel deity. By the standards of his world the man was extremely indulging and forgiving master. Vien could be killed without regret three times already. Poor creature inside her was less selfconscious than dog or cat and it won't suffer. She wouldn't know. It will be better that way. Vien wouldn't be able to give ample protection to the bastard girl after the birth. Ending her existence now will be indeed the best thing Vien can do for her child to be safe from harm and abuse. She owes it to both of her children. Little Jaye needs his mother, she could not leave him with Artri alone. But why it hurts so much?

“I want to visit Jon's grave!” She said. Vien was prepared for the denial but the blackmaned only nodded. “If it will help you to choose the best, of course you can, but you must let me go with you. I'll wait in vicinity because you know I must to keep the eye on you all the time.”
He was far more terrifying like this than any time with the neurowhip of his. Abuse in kid gloves.

So the box had been buried beside Jon Caroll's mound. It was like giving the unborn child under the protection of her friend so she won't be alone here. The letters on the box said: Vinnie Marren Tray. Artri himself has done all that was necessary.

“My poor, sweet baby. I know how tough it was for you.” Artri let her cry on his breast.
“I'm so, so proud of you. It was mature and responsible decision. The best you could make.”
What went down

The girls were told their mistress miscarried, because her child was unable to live. Artri forbade them to talk about it even among themselves.

Vien recovered soon and could resume certain duties sooner than Artri expected.

“Undress and go to bed,” Artri ordered when noticed her presence. “I'll end here and will come to you soon. Wait for me, little Squirrel. You may prepare yourself.”

“So you were in no mood to make yourself useful,” Artri sighed seeing her curled up under the sheets.
“Too bad because I'm more than ready.” The man didn’t kiss her or anything. He took the lubricant from the drawer, slicked her folds and hole with it and when her cunt was prepared that way Art positioned the slave on her hands and knees. Being inside her the male was carefully avoiding to stimulate his partner. He just sought his own pleasure until the girl was filled with the seed of her owner.

“Lay down a bit with your knees up at your belly,” the black-maned instructed her. “Then you may dress and go. I expect you here the same time on all your fertile days. It will continue until you’ll conceive.”

“Congratulations, darling,” Artri smiled. “You are to be the mother again. And you know what? Varney assures me there are two different genetic mosaics in your womb. Do you know what does it mean? Non-identical male twins. Come. It’s time to celebrate.”

The master undressed her and kissed her belly and inner side of her thighs. She only sighed. Apparently she was interesting for him only below the waist. Her head would be an unnecessary distraction unless she was giving him another blowjob. He loved it very much. He said no other was ever that good as she. Which had to be bullshit if anyone would ask her. She still remembered all the pain and fear surrounding Jaye’s birth and yet she will go through even worse torment sooner than she expects. But it was such a terrible choice - to be useful to him again or to be exterminated. He made it clear. She will never be free because he cannot let the mother of his child to be fucked one day again by some random man or men not accepted by him.
This time her lover took care of her satisfaction. She was mewling soon under his touch. Vien was a good girl, and this was her reward for making use of his seed again. After descending from her high, she was laying still. She could afford that. Other women were taking care of her young son and other menial tasks in the household for Vivianne to be her master’s perfect pet and cockwarmer and the incubator for her baby’s brothers and perhaps one day also sisters. Vien should be satisfied. It was most privileged position female creature in The XY Zone could ever achieve. Powerful owner who was also physically attractive and exceptionally skilled lover. Life in luxury and leisure. And hopeless. She was born and raised to different things than this.
At first Artri was elated with his eventual victory over his slave’s stubbornness only to realise soon after it wasn’t exactly what he was aiming for. She had the smile and a good word for everyone but him. Never for him. For Artri it was all proper and stiff. The gaze pregnant slave was measuring her master was empty, like when meeting with him, she was hiding her true personality somewhere deep inside, leaving for him only the husk of the girl he once knew. She seemed to mock Artri, like if saying, she is exactly what he wanted her to be, perfectly obedient creature, never questioning his authority, and asking him, if he really wanted just this. And if so, why he went through all the trouble to make her exactly like The XY Zone raised girls while it was better and far more simple to choose one of them instead and keep Vien only for breeding.

It was after the abortion of Reni’s bastard Art coerced her to accept, when something had changed. It was very subtle on the outside but in fact profound. She stopped teasing him. Her usual playfulness disappeared without the trace. She was solemn, dutiful and serious and was treating him with the exaggerated respect. Ideal slave you may say. Exactly. She was too perfect. Artri scolded himself for his nit-picking but couldn’t help but feel again and again it was not Vivianne he knew.

Sometimes Artri tried to reawaken the bond they once seemed to share. Or were close to share, but it always went awry, leaving him even more frustrated and angry.

“Viv, believe me. I would give my life to defend you and our children.”

“I don’t doubt that, master, but please I’m tired. I want to sleep,” she said ignoring his plea.

“That’s understandable, but please rest for a while. I’ll be right here.”

He tried to touch her cheek, but she flinched, so Artri decided not to. It was becoming extremely upsetting. Artri counted on her maternal hormones to mellow rebellious Argossynian. She was well into her next pregnancy and nothing changed. When with any kind of witness she was the epitome of a good slave, always polite, respectful and perfectly submissive. When alone with him she was all these things too but didn’t even bother to hide it’s only superficial, the mask she was wearing to avoid repressions. Every attempt at warming up their strained relationship was instantly thrown away by the slave. It was like possessing the empty shell. Perfectly built android.

When the soft approach didn’t work Kennert tried a different strategy. Unfortunately, every effort taken to provoke her failed too. Vien received all his orders with humble acceptance. It was always only “Yes, master”, “Sure, master” or “Right away, my lord.” Only if he asked for something impossible, the answer would be “I don’t know, sir, but I’ll try at once.”

Soon it became infuriating. Especially if he couldn’t punish her for this. Because even if she wasn’t pregnant at the moment there was literally nothing substantial to blame her for. The Argossynian has made an idiot out of him and Artri could not change that pitiful state no matter how hard he tried. After some time he stopped doing that, slowly accepting the status quo he could not undermine. Her body was the only thing he could count for in that damned excuse for the relationship, but even this was better than nothing.
“You have summoned me, my lord.”

Artri was so deeply drawn in his thoughts he didn’t realise she’s here already. Vien could move almost without the sound when she wanted. Has she done this to spite him? Artri looked suspiciously at the Argossynian girl. Her double pregnancy was showing up. She couldn’t hide her very promising condition anymore. After the while he scolded himself for such stupid thinking, it approached paranoia. Of course she didn’t.

“Well,” he said getting up from the chair and circling the desk to occupy the same side as she.

“I have new orders for you. I have noticed you visit certain... spot every single day. Am I right?”

“Absolutely, my lord. But I’m taking the guard with me every time I go, just as you told me to do.”

“It’s good, I’m glad you take care of yourself and babies but every such walk leaves you miserable and in the state of melancholy. I want these visits to stop.” Artri was watching closely her reaction to this demand. Vivianne’s lower lip seemed to tremble a little, but she didn’t dare to protest.

“Yes, yes, of course,” she said at last.
“As you wish, master. May I go now?”

“Why in such a hurry?” Artri didn’t want to dismiss her yet. “Don’t you want to spend time with your most staunch admirer?” He asked, approaching the girl even closer, to free her soft hair from the braid she used to wear lately. She was standing straight and without a slightest move, breathing evenly. Cold and distant even if her gorgeous body was deliciously warm.

“If you wish me to…” she started.

“And what do you want? Do you want to stay longer with me?” Artri asked. This time he won’t let her spite him again.

“I... I don’t feel well my lord. I think returning would be the wisest move but if you wish me to stay I will comply.”

“So you think I can’t take care of you in case it becomes worse. Are your servants better caretakers than me?”

“No,” she tried to smile boldly.
“I trust you, my lord.”

“Oh, do you, really?” Artri looked at her not hiding his scepticism.

“Yes,” she insisted. “I know you won’t hurt me.”

“Because you have been hurt by me enough?”

“I didn’t mean that, my lord.” She responded, holding for dear life to that infuriating calmness she was torturing him with every day and many nights. It was all in vain. She will never be different.

“Did you forget I have the name I wanted you to address me with it?” Artri asked stepping back a little. Feeling her warmth was a wonderful experience, but he didn’t want to show her how desperate
he is.

“That I didn’t, my lord,” Vivianne whispered. “But after what I have done I don’t feel worthy of such familiarity with my ruler. But if you insist…”

“No, I don’t,” he said. “I won’t be coercing you to do the things you’re not comfortable with. Staying with me here any longer included.”

“But I…” she started.

“I have changed my mind. You can go now.”

“I understand,” Vien nodded. “Thank you, sir. I wish you good evening.” And soon she was gone, to join her girls and the little son for chit chatting and silly giggles; Vien almost never smiled while with him, let alone laughed.

Heather could tell Vien was upset. She was almost always upset whenever returning from Mr. Kennert apartments. And this time it wasn’t different. It all went sour after her miscarriage and the obvious chemistry between the master and mistress ceased to exist.

At first Heather would never tell Mr. Kennert was the man blaming the mother for losing the child but apparently she was wrong. It wasn’t just, but the servant had no say in these matters. She could only watch how the vibrant and lively personality of her young mistress fades and crumbles to dust.

She never told them, her and Lea how exactly she was punished for conceiving the baby unable to live but it had to be something terrible. And even Vivianne’s new pregnancy wasn’t able to make things right.

It changed her, possibly forever. Heather inwardly lamented she couldn’t have her friend, as she was before, for at least a little longer, but there was nothing she might do. The only thing available for Heather in this dire situation was trying to lessen her mistress’s burdens and care for her as best as she could. And this she promised herself to do.

Artri was watching their closeness with envy. In a different situation, the proud man would laugh in the face of anyone implying he might be jealous of the girl who barely could read when for the first time arrived to their household but now like pitiful stalker he was spying on Vien and Heather sometimes using chips and hidden cameras. All those small but endearing acts of intimacy from adjusting locks of hair and skirts to talking for hours. What so interesting that girl had to tell her mistress after the whole life spent in birthing and slave houses. And yet Vivianne preferred her company over the Universe famous scientist’s. Vien always had time for her little servant while being with him she was only looking for the excuse to flee.

One day he had it enough. He summoned Vivianne to his office. She was in the middle of second trimester, almost constantly unwell even if the character of her ailings was elusive. Luckily it wasn’t anything that could pose the danger to his babies well-being and doctors told him not to worry.

“Are you feeling better today?” Artri asked the girl with false concern.

“I believe you do,” he said not waiting for the answer. “That’s good because I wanted you to take care about one important issue.”
“Important issue? What do you mean, master? Did something happen?” Vien looked at him alarmed.

“Nothing happened. I feel obligated to point your female personnel’s inappropriate way of addressing you. Did you ever saw my employees using my name when talking to me. Certainly not. And I demand exactly the same for my partner. Tell your women to call you properly as befits your rank and station.”

That look in her eyes was priceless. For the moment Artri hoped she will argue like in good old days but Vien swallowed her protests and only asked.

“Is it necessary? I mean no one sees us here, master.”

“If it wasn’t necessary, we wouldn’t be talking about it. Besides, our son is listening and soon it won’t be only him.”

“You mean his brothers?”

“I mean people of Galdanede where we are to move soon. Your pregnancy is settled enough for us to resume our public duties. We can’t stay too long out of focus and I want you to give birth in Cycads Valley, like with Jaye. Hopefully, this time nothing will disturb the presentation of my younger offspring. That will be all. You can go now and take care about the fulfillment of your orders.”

“Whatever you command, master,” she meekly accepted his demand.
Before the costume party

Vien was reclining on the sofa with Jaye glued to her. Even if she wasn’t nursing him for many months now the bond between them was as strong as ever. Jaye loved his father and aunts but Vien was always someone special to him. Vien was reading for the boy. It was one of his favourite pastimes lately.

The girl acutely begrudged she can’t take him on trips to show her clever boy how the worlds look in real life not only on the screens and in simulations. He surely deserved to have a healthy mother, not the one who sometimes had the problem to get up from the bed. And it wasn’t even half of the way with Wayne and Danny. The doctors were shaking heads over her. Despite many tests and examinations they couldn’t find what is the source of their patient’s poor condition.

That was a paradox of sorts. People who could raise deceased persons from the dead weren’t able to help with her prosaic ailings in the slightest.

Surely Artri wasn’t helping too, suggesting, when they were alone together, purely psychosomatic reasons, namely ill will from her side. Because with a bastard girl she was perfectly okay and her problems started with the presence of his rightful offspring. Like she was the masochist and wanted to suffer and neglect the son who needed her! But Artri was Artri and Vien realised she had become accustomed to his nastiness like to the part of unavoidable price she must pay for living with Jaye and Heather.

Besides, her illness, or whatever it was, made Vien oblivious to the great extent to other unpleasant things like her love/hate relationship with Kennert for example. She had not enough of strength left to hair splitting about what exactly it is she feels toward the man after everything that happened. It was far more needed to keep her more or less functioning and spending as much quality time with her son as possible.

Unfortunately, today peaceful evening wasn’t for Vivianne. Soon she must get up and change for the party at Merrivers, leaving Jaye under his foster aunts’ care. It was one Galdanedian holiday, Vien forgot which, and they were organising huge festivity to celebrate the day. Artri didn’t want to listen to Lea’s humble suggestions that maybe her mistress should be spared from accompanying him to the event.

Kennert ordered very special dress for her before long because it was a costume party no less. People will wear clothes from various historical epochs of old Earth. For Vivianne her master has chosen a Victorian dress with numerous skirts and petticoats. Even if they were stiffened by light stergant wires instead of steel or whalebones still these clothes were uncomfortable and, despite other contemporary modifications, also heavy and restricting. She will sweat in them, Vien was sure about it.

Hopefully, they won’t stay long, she thought, letting Artri with Lea’s help to dress her in subsequent layers of sapphire monstrosity. It was exactly like she expected. Even if tailor-made the outfit unpleasantly constricted her pregnant belly and tender breasts.

Going to the restroom will be the challenge in clothes like these. When Vien sat to let them combing her hair, using many hairpins and ribbons, she already had enough.

“Beautiful,” Artri seemed to be extremely pleased by the outcome of his and Lea’s joined efforts. “If I wasn’t passionately in love with your mistress, Leandra, I would surely fall for her again just now,” he said. “And who could think such dirt raised creature may show that much dignity and class?” He added. If her master thought the insult may move her, he was wrong.

“I thank you for the compliment, my lord,” the Argossynian said without even blinking.
“Mr Kennert,” always watchful Lea dared to interfere. “Maybe I’ll go with the mistress? She may need my help during the event in her delicate condition…”

“Your mistress goes with me.” Her eagerness did not impress Artri this time. “Do you suggest I’m unfit to care about her well-being for a few hours and won’t do without your input?”

“Of course not,” Leandra had to acknowledge her defeat.

“You can leave us now,” the scientist dismissed the servant.

“I wish you a pleasant evening, Mr Kennert, mistress,” Lea curtsied and left obediently.

Vien slowly raised her head.

“That coiffure fits you,” Artri said, looking her in the eyes. “And luckily Victorian ladies used no makeup so nothing would mar your perfectly natural beauty. Wait for me, little Squirrel. I’ll soon be back. For the first time dressing you took much more time than I will need to change into my costume."

When Kennert emerged soon after his look was a great surprise. Vien was sure Artri will choose one of opulent historical male clothes like European late mediaeval, Renaissance or baroque, something in intense colours with a lot of velvet, lace and jewels, elements he usually adopted for his more formal outfits or just for fun. Despite her expectations Vivianne’s owner was dressed in a coal black classic XX century suit with a snow-white shirt and a bowtie. There was no trace of his afternoon makeup and man’s glorious hair was gathered into the tight knot at the nape of his neck. Of all the jewelry Artri left only one nigrite ring. With his monochromatic outfit and milky white complexion the only colourful accent were his amazing eyes framed by naturally black eyelashes.

Artri look ravishing. Without doubt he will be most handsome man of the gathering and his minimalism will make him outstanding persona among more colourfully dressed guests.

Black was accentuating his slim and graceful figure.

In the master's presence Vivianne will look like a ball. It was cruel to dress her like that and order to stand beside him. People will talk. And their opinions won’t be friendly and favourable for her. Vien has hidden her face in the hands in lace gloves. She was devastated.

“What’s wrong, baby?” Kennert was kneeling beside her. “You don’t like my costume? I know, to be a hundred percent relevant to historical sources I should cut my hair short but somehow I’m not keen to do that. You think it doesn’t fit, like I made it?”

“No, no,” she groaned. “You look perfect. As always.”

“I’m glad you like it. You know you’re the only person I want to please,” he whispered taking her hands and kissing them. “Come, we can’t be late. It would be very impolite.”
Costume party. Arrival

When in the carriage Artri turned to Vivianne sitting with a grave face next to him. The man took his pregnant slave by the hand and said.

“I recommend you to smile when we’ll reach our destination. Woman who has caught Galdanedian biggest fish cannot show to the others she doesn’t care. Remember, our children will share my position so being you I wouldn’t undermine it by your incessant sulking.”

“I’m sorry, my lord, I didn’t want to spoil your evening. I’ll try.” Vivianne attempted to be true to her word but result was overly pathetic. The budding headache she left home with turned to full-fledged now and seemed to build even further. She barely saw anything before her.

Even if Vien wasn’t pregnant, she wouldn’t be allowed any painkillers but laying still in the darkness with a cold compress on the forehead surely would ease her discomfort a little at least. Mingling with a huge crowd of visitors as usual at Merrivers, will surely aggravate her pitiful state. She couldn’t tell Artri any of this. The man would accuse her of exaggerating or even simulation. So much about taking care of her and worshipping the ground she will walk on…

When Vivianne and her owner arrived to the party most guests were already present. The hosts were waiting for them to greet the power couple on their threshold. They were dressed as the wealthy pair of ancient Egyptians. Both looked regal and intriguing with the green and black makeup and clothes made of pure white linen. Knowing Keith, paints were made of natural minerals and linen for their outfits was field grown, not synthesized cellulose. Anabelle was wearing the black wig and her partner the nemes headdress. Actually, the view was that fantastic Vivianne almost forgot her awful headache, at least for a while.

“Wow, you look great,” she smiled candidly for the first time today after parting with Jaye.

“Oh, but not as great as your very own fiancé,” Belle laughed. After initial distrust between them mainly from Keith’s slave’s side she and Vien were on great terms again, the cause of former breach long forgotten.

“I’m glad you like our costumes,” Keith smiled to her warmly. “It’s you though who will be the real star of our gathering. You look so beautiful and dignified in these clothes, like our queen, no less. That colour complements your eyes and hair admirably and the cut hides your condition well. How long are you, can you remind me?”

“It’s almost eighteen weeks now, Mr Merriver,” Vivianne answered.

“Just Keith, darling, just Keith,” the physicist corrected her delicately. “No need for excessive formalities. We are here like the family.”

“Come on, Merriver,” It was Artri speaking at last while putting his hand on Vivianne’s neck. “Are you that desperate to woo the pregnant woman?”

Vien barely stopped from flinching. Why was he like this? Keith just wanted to be polite to the oppressed creature. One look at him though and Vivianne knew the other man wasn’t feeling offended. It was just a friendly banter, nothing more. It was she who became oversensitive lately. Vien should try not to be that po-faced all the time lest Artri will look for more merry and amiable companion.

“Desperate?” Keith laughed. “You can’t blame me for complimenting pretty girl when I see one.”
“Thank you,” Vien said. “You’re so nice. Especially I know well I’m anything but at the moment.” She shouldn’t say such things when her critical master was present. She’s here to play devoted and grateful Kennert’s partner not talking about her insecurities to everyone ready to listen. Vien surely will be scolded after for what he used to call attention seeking and inspiring pity. He knew what words to use to hurt her deeply. No starvings and no beatings didn’t mean lack of abuse.

Luckily Artri seemed to be oblivious to her slip.
“Fisher’s not coming?” He asked casually.
“Unfortunately Tommy long planned to visit his father just this week, so I knew him and Sara won’t be available,” Keith said. “He didn’t tell you?”
“He might mention something like that but I completely forgot.”

Vien felt even more upset after hearing the news about Sally’s absence.
“And Nelly?” She dared to ask.

“Oh, they must be here somewhere,” Anabelle said. “We let the Spaldings to take their brat with them.”

As if to confirm her words a little boy emerged from the crowd and seeing Vien ran to her.
“Aunt Vien, aunt Vien!” he shouted. Vivianne kneeled to embrace him. Even if they didn’t meet often Nelly’s son liked her very much and also Jaye, whom he treated almost like a younger brother.
“Aunt Vien,” the boy gasped looking at her with awe. “So pretty!” He touched reverently sapphire and blue ribbons in her hair.

Vien just realized Murry is wearing a dress, very nice cream coloured, knee long dress with a blue sash and with it white socks and buckle shoes. In that moment Nelly and Tan joined the group.
“Murray, come here,” Stanley called his son. “Don’t overstrain your aunt, she’s expecting babies!”

“Babies?” Murray’s eyes were big as saucers. “What does it mean, daddy, expecting babies?”
“I’ll tell you later,” the man laughed lifting him up.

Vien wanted to stand when she spotted her master’s hand extended to her. This time she accepted his help with gratitude.
“Everybody’s complimenting you,” he whispered, “remember I was the first.”

“No, no, it’s okay,” Vien smiled to both father and son. “Nice outfit.”

This time Nelly spoke. “When I have chosen the bustle we looked for the costume for our little one from the same epoch and we’ve found boys of his age were dressed in the same manner as girls. Isn’t he cute like that?”

“Yes, very,” Vivianne smiled again. “I wonder how my Froglet would look in similar clothes.”

“I don’t doubt he would be equally adorable,” Nelly nodded.

“Dear ladies and gentlemen,” it was Artri again. “We will chat later. Now I promised my baby the dance. This one is slow so it would be perfect. May we be excused for a while, please?” Nobody dared to oppose.
Costume party. The stranger

Artri led her by the hand to the dance-floor.
“But you didn’t, master,” she protested weakly.
“I know, right?” He said pulling her closer. “I wanted to remind you certain things. First about not showing everyone you meet, how miserable you are under my rule. Because you’re not, you ungrateful creature. You are one of most privileged females of this planet. Better remember that.”

“I guess I am,” she said placatingly, not trying to get back from his embrace. “Especially with the most lovely and promising child you gave me.”
“Oh, about our son,” he said. “When we are at it, stop calling him that, especially publicly.”

“Like what?”

“You know exactly what I am talking about. It’s untoward and childish.”

“But he is the child,” Vien groaned silently. “Not yet a year and a half old.”

“Sure, but sooner than you think he will have to go to school. You wouldn’t like to see other children mocking him for being the mama’s boy?”

Vien wanted to argue. To shout Jaye is clever and brave, the real wolf child and that it’s her right to call him however she likes but soon realised Artri is trying to make her do exactly that. Despite the headache and discomfort Vien was determined to not let him manipulate her again. Besides these were only words. They were not important. Her love for that child was and he’ll never be able to rob her of that precious feeling. No matter how hard he would try.

“As you wish, master,” she said instead of quarreling. “It will be exactly how you want it.”

They weren’t talking anymore during that dance. When the music was over Artri walked her to the sofa where he told his slave to rest.

“I’ll leave you for some time,” he said. “I have to talk to some persons. Plus, I have a certain business with Curtis and it seems Kertie was here somewhere. I’ll soon be back.” Before going Artri brought her water with ice. Vien immediately applied cold glass to her temple, constantly pulsating with pain. She drank it with small gulps because she was slowly becoming nauseous.

Cold water helped a little and Vien was sitting quietly watching Keith’s guests and mind blowing the variety of their costumes. That’s how Galdanedian high society people entertain themselves, she thought, while Riadisans are killing their female offspring and torment their women. Artri promised to do something in that regard but she wasn’t informed so far about anything substantial. Maybe she had to wait until Jaye and his siblings will be able to act. And it means she must deliver them safely.

In the opposite corner of the room Vien spotted her master, talking now to his red-headed colleague. She has heard from someone Kertie got himself new slave when Vien was stuck on Perennis. It was most probably the girl who joined them now, tall and imposing in late Roman republic outfit with a golden diadem in the curly hair. It was too far and too dark to recognize the face of the newcomer but that person reminded her someone she knew well from Argossyne, namely May Taner, the psychologist who proved to be the XY Zone spy. Christine told her the woman was to be arrested, but she had to find out about her uncovering and escaped.

May or not, Vien was watching disbelievingly how the girl laughs with both scientists apparently having a good time together. Was Artri flirting with her?
Was it possible? He never was the playboy like Keith or Tommy but nobody could forbid him to have fun with other females if he wanted.

But worse happened soon after. Kertie patted the coordinator on the shoulder. They exchanged a few words and Kennert went out with that woman toward private rooms. Maybe they wanted to talk without music interfering but somehow she suspected it wasn’t the case.

Vien wanted to run, to ask what’s happening even if it was strictly forbidden. Her duty was to tolerate such behaviour with dignity and serene face but her instincts were urging her to do exactly opposite. As far as she knew after parting with Francesca the physicist was faithful to her, even when she was out of his reach. Until now. That business with Kert, Artri was talking about, was it making out with other man’s new slave? Was it all planned to humiliate her publicly, for everyone to see?

Soon it was too late to stop them. Vien wanted at least to hide somewhere instead of sitting in the spotlight. She tried to get up but her head was spinning so much she had to sit again.

“Something’s wrong?” She heard someone asking. It was Stanley, smiling to her, hiding real concern behind friendly demeanour, Nelly at his side with Murray in her arms.

“No, it’s okay,” she managed. “I’m only feeling nauseous, can you bring me more that ice and water? It helps.”

“Of course, darling.” When Tan went for the drink Nelly sat next to her. “We came only to say good night because Murry wants to sleep but now seeing you I’m worried. Where’s your master? He should not leave you like that when you’re not feeling well.”

“Nathoo has some urgent business to attend,” Vien said. No way she can tell her friends what she saw. Soon they probably will know but not now and not from her. “He will come for me when he will finish, whatever it was. You really need not change your plans because of me.”

“Okay, if you say so,” Nelly agreed reluctantly. “I will tell Anabelle to keep the eye on you. Just in case.”

Spaldings wished Vivianne good night and promised to visit her and Jaye soon. And then the pair was gone, leaving Vien alone in the crowd.
Costume party. Giving up

Unfortunately, too much water meant Vien had to visit restroom at one moment. But how to use it with that awful thing she was dressed in. It would be the problem for any healthy person but with her dizziness it was nothing less than a recipe for the disaster.

What Vien can do? She had the communicator with her so theoretically she should call her master, who promised to care about his slave’s needs. But somehow she dreaded to be with him now. Besides, he can accuse her of disturbing him whatever activities the man now sported.

Another option was to summon Artri’s guards to take her home. Maybe at least Thad, who liked her, would do it for his mistress. But then again the boy was too afraid of his employer to follow her orders when lacking Kennert’s authorisation. Vivianne didn’t want to see him fired without references.

It looked like she had to wait for Artri’s return or ask Anabelle for help. Unfortunately, the hostess was nowhere to in sight, the host either. Excellent. Just excellent. She has to do it herself. She was now more angry than sad. For Artri to drag Vien there and leaving to her own devices for Goddess knows how long, for that ridiculous costume, for her irrationally reacting organism.

Vien stood up slowly, waiting for the wave of nausea to hit her, like it often occurred when she was changing her position even a little too abruptly. Luckily nothing happened. So far so good. She was standing.

“Okay, boys,” Vien mumbled, “maybe we can make it by ourselves.” She rarely was talking to them, Vien realised. They were an indirect cause of her troubles, but it was hard to blame them. Next move was to localise the place she needed. It wasn’t very far. Maybe she can manage. More than halfway went good. Until it didn’t.

Suddenly she stumbled and would fall if not one guest, who supported her with a firm grip. She turned to that person to thank them but stiffened, seeing who it was. Her rescuer, wearing Indian leather costume, had familiar to her brown eyes of Reni Cray.

“Easy, first lady, you might hurt yourself!” the man smiled. Vien overcame the surge of growing panic. They were in a public setting and nobody except for them and Artri himself knew about their one time tryst. And her master was still absent from the main hall.

“What can I do for you?” Reni asked.
“Please walk me to one of those sofas, please, and find Anabelle for me. Tell her I may need her.” Warren has made exactly what Vien told him to do and without needless discussions went to search for their beautiful hostess.
Vivianne was grateful for his newfound politeness. She wondered if Artri had some serious conversation with the boy but for obvious reasons couldn’t ask neither Reni nor his coordinator.

Soon Belle came to her.
“What is it, sweetie?” she asked. Before Vien knew how to respond, the woman in Egyptian clothes looked at her insightfully and shook her head in disbelief.
“I know little about pregnancies and childbirth but surely you don’t look well,” she said. “You’re deathly pale!”
“I know,” Vien sighed. “I feel that awful almost since the beginning. It’s probably because of twin pregnancy with modificated embryos and doctors can’t do anything to lessen my troubles.”
Anabelle scowled. “Artri should take you home. I’ll find him immediately.”
“You won’t.” Vivianne sighed again. “He went somewhere and ordered me to wait. I only want to use the restroom. Just help me get there and then I’ll be waiting some more. I can’t annoy my master more than he already is.”

“Annoy your master? What do you mean? You are unwell and because of his bloody offspring. It’s his duty to take care of it!”
“Anabelle, don’t,” Vien groaned, “just do what I ask for. You don’t help making the fuss.”

“I don’t like it one bit,” Belle was unconvinced but helped Vivianne to stand. This time it went much worse and pregnant girl had to sit again. “I can’t,” she whispered, “It seems you were right. Please call him.”
Resigned she gave Belle her communicator which the other woman used at once. When Kennert didn’t respond despite her many efforts, she called her own partner instead.

“What’s happening?” Keith was with them in no time.
“Vien is not feeling well and we can’t find her master,” Anabelle confessed. “I think it would be the best to take her to the nearest bed and call her doctor.”

“Do you want me to?” Merriver was asking Vien.

“Yes, please,” Vivianne felt too weak to argue. “No doctors yet, but laying down a bit would do me good until my worst dizziness subsidies. It will pass, I hope. And sorry for your troubles.”

“It’s no trouble at all. A pleasure to serve,” Keith smiled comfortingly. “That’s what friends are for.”
Costume party. The aftermath

It was a great relief to take off at last heavy and uncomfortable dress. Anabelle, who was helping her with uneasy task, nearly groaned seeing bruisings left by restricting clothes on Vivianne’s delicate body.

“I could not believe he ordered you to wear a corset under it. In your condition? Nothing strange you felt dizzy. Even for entirely healthy person it would be the challenge to wear that thing.”

Belle has lent Vien one of her own nightgowns to change into before going to bed. She also freed Vivianne’s hair from all its pins and ribbons.

“Thank you, Bell, you’re an angel. You both are,” Vien said, laying her troubled head on the pillow. “I don’t know what I would do without you.”

When Artri returned to the main hall, he couldn’t find his slave, neither where he left her nor in vicinity of the place. Naughty girl wandered somewhere, he thought. How’s that possible? She was playing weak and nearly fainting and now felt strong enough to walk somewhere far without no one to safeguard her?

Unless she was simulating, just like Artri suspected. She would do anything to not stay at his side a minute longer than necessary. Physicist was sure she has seen him with Kertie’s new slave. That woman was not only beautiful and majestic but also witty and intelligent. And came from Double X Zone. She reminded him to a certain extent Vivianne before she has turned to that pitiful zombie of sorts. They were only talking, nothing more, even if Artri suspected Kert would let him easily, he wasn’t very possessive type. Vivianne didn’t need to know what really happened, but he hoped she suspected the worst.

He wanted her to be jealous. Maybe this would throw her out of that abominable state of constant, dutiful acceptance. Artri was almost sure he’ll find her anxious, upset or maybe even sobbing silently because of what she thought happened, but Vien wasn’t even there.

“Where’s she?” Artri asked Keith when saw him at last.

“Oh, here you are, coordinator!” Merriver sent him an accusatory glance. “At long last! Your sweet baby could die and you wouldn’t know. Bell and me have taken poor thing to bed. I have to carry her because she was that dizzy. Being you I would check on her immediately.”

Vien had to nap for the while. The raised female voice awakened her. Soon the slave realised it’s Anabelle, scolding her master.

“And to think I have almost condemned her for deserting you on Argossyne. Now I know she had more than good reasons for it. Because eliminating you would be the gift for humanity, the man who punishes pregnant mother, leaving her to suffer!”
Then Vien heard Keith intervening. “It’s enough Bell, you will surely wake our guest shouting like that,” he said.

“May I see my slave?” Artri’s seemed to be unimpressed by Belle’s accusations. “I’m very grateful for your help, but it’s time to take her home.”

This time nobody dared to deny him the entrance so Vien soon could see her owner.

Artri was still in his costume but his hair was hanging down now. He looked even better like that.

“I’m sorry, my lord,” Vien was first to talk.

“It’s okay,” Artri silenced her. “Anabelle told me everything. I’m taking you home as soon as the guard will bring here one of your dresses. You can’t wear your costume again or parade publicly in Belle’s nightgown. How are you now?” he asked like as out of sheer duty.

“A little better,” Vivianne admitted.

When Grant came with clothes for Vien, Artri waited until she changed to a new dress and ordered the guard to carry her home. She barely could repeat her thanks to Keith and Anabelle when they were all already out of their apartments.

Vien was sure she could go to sleep as soon as they’ll return, but it didn’t happen.

“Where are you going, Squirrel?” Artri asked her when she tried to sneak out of the room to join her son and servants.

“I haven’t let you leave this place yet.”

“My lord?” Vien couldn’t hide her surprise.

“Now, you have no problem with walking, I see,” he said, measuring her with an unfriendly look.

“I... I feel a little better after the nap at Merrivers.”

Artri nodded. “Sure,” he said. “You feel better when it suits you, and worse when you can use it, for the others to pity you.”

“Do you accuse me of manipulation, master?” Vien groaned disbelievingly.

“I don’t know what kind of game you play, little Squirrel but I’m sure I don’t like it. You made it abundantly clear you don’t want to accompany your master to the celebration and apparently found the way to spoil the occasion for our hosts and me, respectively.”

“I didn’t…”

“Be silent, slave,” Artri spat with venom. “If you think you cannot be punished now, you’re gravely mistaken. Take off your clothes. You will stand here naked until I will let you go.”

It was ridiculous. Did Artri really thought she was trying to manipulate him and the others? How much was he biased to accuse Vien of something that pointless and plain stupid?

She did as she was told though, wondering how long it will take until she faints.
An hour passed. Then another. Artri was sure Vien will soon ask him to finish her punishment. Why she has to be that stubborn? He didn’t want to endanger her health or that of their babies. It wasn’t meant as any serious penance. Just the sign of his disapproval for her little tricks, nothing more, but the bloody Argossynian girl has turned the case into another tug of war between them.

And it will be him to relent as first. When Artri realised his pregnant slave started to tremble, he couldn’t wait any longer.

“Are you satisfied with yourself?” Artri spat coming closer with a dressing gown in his hand.

“Master?”

Her lips had a bluish tint. The girl was shivering out of cold.

“I see you would rather die here or miscarry than ask me for a leniency!”

His words sounded bitterly but that terrible female creature didn’t seem to be moved.

“You ordered me to stand, not to beg,” she said.

“If I knew you wanted me begging, master, I would do this as best as I could. But you didn’t tell me. How can I know what to do when you don’t tell me? I can’t read minds. You ordered me to stand so I…”

“Okay, okay. I get it. You have won, you insolent creature. What am I to do for you to stop tormenting me?”

“I’m sorry, my lord,” she whispered. “I didn’t mean to.”

For Artri it was enough. He put the dressing gown on trembling woman. If she really wants it, he can deliver.

“Where are you taking me, master?” Vien asked.

“Why, to the bedroom. I plan to warm you with my body heat. Don’t be afraid. I don’t want to do anything more than that.”

Vien said nothing. She let herself be carried. It was Artri who was talking.

“If you want to act like simple slave, I will treat you like one. I wanted us to be more than that, partners and associates but apparently you aren’t interested in such arrangement and I can’t make you what you don’t like to be. Since now on I won’t be explaining to you or discussing any of my decisions regarding your person. You have to accept them and act accordingly. And don’t cry about it later. Not protesting now means you agree.”

Vien didn’t plan to argue. Even if she knew Artri still hopes she would change her mind the girl didn’t want to help him in any of this. It’s much better when things are called as they really are. Their so-called partnership meant for Vien only justifying his choices. Like with planning her next pregnancy, like with aborting her little daughter, like with that last party and so on. She was silent when Artri was embracing her.
It Could Be Sunshine

Artri was watching Vivianne, who was taking her usual walk through the flower garden. He smiled, seeing her stance, with widely spaced legs and the whole silhouette bent visibly backwards to balance the enormous weight of her thirty-eighth weeks pregnant belly. Thirty-eight weeks with twins. Who could say the former little Argossynian rebel would be so perfectly fulfilling the role he designed for her from the beginning?

Despite of her doctors’ incessant babbling she made it already to full term and her young but tired body was ready to give birth anytime now. She looked like every declared sadist’s wet dream. Conquered and fully subdued.

Artri should be happy but he wasn’t. Not quite. Jaye was a true miracle and to be the father of even more children was wonderful perspective but their mother seemed forever lost to him.

As soon as she released the second placenta, women helped her to move from the place of delivery to comfortable, freshly made bed. Kennert came when they were still cleaning her from sweat and blood.

“Leave us alone,” he said in a harsh tone.

“Oh, but we aren’t done yet, sir,” Heather tried against all odds.

“You’ll end this when I will call you again,” the physicist was unrelenting. Vien could only look helplessly as her companions were leaving the birthing room in a hurry, while she had to stay alone with the unpredictable being.

“Have you come to kill me?” she asked after taking the deep breath.

“Pardon?” Kennert looked at her with an unreadable expression of his angelic features.

“Well, you have three healthy boys from me. I conclude from this, that you do not need me anymore.”

“Really? You have lost a lot of blood, Squirrel, if you’re capable of such macabre jokes. Who in their right mind would get rid of such a great stud bitch? No, sweetheart, this lovely belly of yours will serve my family and me more than once or two times.”

“Do you think I have not heard what the doctor have said, that I will definitely not live another unassisted childbirth?”

“You should learn to eavesdrop better. Dear Varney meant this delivery. He’s a good doctor, but definitely was wrong this time. And maybe you are a little too pale and you have a throat virtually ripped from screaming in pain but you still do not look like dying, sweetling. I will leave you now to rest a little before they bring you the children. Then let them dress you up nicely and you will receive congratulations.”

Her girls were holding the babies because she was too frazzled to keep even one child in her own arms. It was the barbaric custom keeping her on display like that.
Everybody was looking at her with pity and Vien tried not to break. She was griping the armrests of her wheelchair with all her might to not moan from lingering pain of her retracting uterus. She even squeezed out the word or two in the answer to the kind words of the guests. If she didn’t, she would be scolded by her master later for not socializing enough. The weakness was not excuse and it couldn’t free her from the rest of her duties as her owner’s personal slave.

It was excruciating. Vivianne was thirsty, and it seemed she was bleeding too much but there was no way she could tell this to anyone. She had to smile, swallowing the tears and pretending she’s happy.
Price to pay

Chapter Summary

Some grisly details of Vivianne's last labour.

It was cruel and unnecessary. Artri knew it very well. Nobody dared to tell him this, probably because his slave’s friends were too afraid their attempts at intervention can only aggravate her situation.

She was crying when Art came in, sobbing into the pillow.
“Come on,” he said. “Stop these tears. Nothing terrible happens to you. Think about poor Rissa. That was the tragedy and something to cry about.”

“I know,” she said, sitting straight on the bed. “I’m so stupid. I’m sorry.” She surely didn’t look like a mother of three children now. More like a child herself, lost and vulnerable, and afraid of him.

“I didn’t mean you any harm during last labour. Now you can see it. Decision about postponing the cesarean was the best anyone could make in the situation like yours. You were already halfway through so there was no need to cut through your pretty belly. Your body suffered much less in a long term with the turning of the second boy in your womb and birthing him physiologically. It was risky, I must admit but none of you was in a real danger. Believe me, I had only your well-being in mind. Yours and that of our children.”

“I… I know,” she stammered. “Nobody’s accusing you, my lord.”

She was lying but Artri let her. There was no way he could convince Vien about his good intentions. She was his most precious treasure, even more valuable than their babies, no matter how wonderful and promising, but even if he would tell her this she wouldn’t believe. It was his curse and constant punishment but there was no coming back.

“And I’m sorry for being harsh to you when you needed exactly opposite. It’s because you could not trust me. The best proof was asking me after, if I came to kill you. I never wanted to end your life and you should know this.”

“I apologize for judging you unjustly, my lord. Forgive me, it only proves how weak I am,” and then her chin quivered and she was sobbing again.

“Are you that unhappy with me?” He asked, embracing the girl but Vivianne wasn’t able to answer for the long time.

Vien didn’t let the measured and seemingly reasonable words of her master to beguile her. It was tempting to believe him and stop her inner fighting.

She was still awfully sore both physically and emotionally. Still remembered her purely animalistic fear when she heard there’s a serious problem with her second baby. Doctors suggested immediate
surgery, but that fiend told them to wait and think about alternative solution.

Vien, already bleeding and delirious from pain, had to lay down and one medic attempted to correct the malposition of the foetus. Only if it didn’t work, the cesarean was the next choice.

Luckily the man was a skilled professional and his manoeuvre led to desired effect, the aftermath of which was her third living child appearing in the outside world after next twenty minutes. Danny was healthy, and he soon joined his brother in the hands of waiting neonatologists.

After her terrible experience Vien has lost completely the rest of delusions about her owner’s real intentions. She was nothing to him but another instrument of fulfilling his ambitious plans, cherished when useful but to be thrown away when no longer needed. She couldn’t be sure anymore his goals were those, which Artri had described for her in the beginning. Most probably it wasn’t the intention to improve things, that was behind the scientist’s doings, but pure desire for even more power and domination. Vien was only the pawn in his hands and her sufferings meant nothing to him. It was just the price to pay, and it wasn’t him who was paying.
Insomnia

Vivianne Tray Kennert. Pretty, obedient and fertile slave, mistress and mother. The true gem of the famous scientist’s household. Or so people thought. Everybody believed she admires and loves her master. And they could not be further from truth. But it wasn’t in Artri’s best interests to tell them they’re wrong. They both were destined to play that farce for the sake of their children. Nobody was to know how things truly are between the couple.

Irony of it all was laying in the fact, it was exactly Artri’s initial goal this relationship was meant to achieve. To give him healthy, clever offspring, not suffering from the curse.

The physicist never imagined he can fall for any woman that deeply and hopelessly. And it was worse and worse with each passing day. All he felt for Vai was pale in comparison with this insanity.

Artri was basically alone with his problem.
He was far too ashamed by his impotence in gaining his own slave’s trust and reciprocality to confess it even before his best friends. Yes, even Tommy. Besides, Fisher most probably wouldn’t understand at all what Artri would talk about. Artri’s chosen one was beside him anytime he wanted, bore them beautiful children and was available for the man always, when her health allowed it. What more one can need from the woman, Tommy would ask.

Indeed, what more one can need? What a pity Kennert has been born Makantaran. Galdanedians had it easier. Much easier. Their culture was far more permissive and laid back. There were viciously jealous and monstrously possessive Galdanedians too, it was all dependent on particular personality but such behaviour wasn’t encouraged. They could share with the others even most beloved partners and see nothing unusual in it. The concept of sexual fidelity was strange for them at best, suspicious at worse. According to men he knew, it was unreasonable to complicate things like that.

Luckily they were tolerating his own possessive behaviour, reasoning that their leader needs to keep his woman only for himself on account of her unrestricted fertility. Surely they knew Artri could not risk finding the bastard in his mistress’s womb and stopped even asking. Except for Reni. And now even Cray was silent.

Artri never told the boy about his and Vivianne’s unborn daughter, who’s meagre remains were laid to rest under Perennian soil. As he promised his slave only three persons could know about her existence and it would never change. He hasn’t even banned Warren from his team but Reni seemed to feel something wasn’t entirely right. Artri didn’t know what kind of sixth sense told the young man about this but without doubt his behaviour has changed. Maybe he felt remorse for doing something against his coordinator’s wishes. Whatever it was Artri didn’t ask.

And so Artri’s most shameful secrets were safe. Or rather they were close to be if not for the one particular person. And no, it wasn’t Vivianne. His sweet lamb was playing her part admirably and always will be. If not out of pity for her cruel master, then because of the women she loved and didn’t want to be harmed one day. And for the children to grow in a pleasant and healthy environment between agreeable parents, not constantly waging war on themselves. It was far more than his own father could ever count for.

And it was Varian who didn’t let the perfect picture of his son’s relationship deceive him. Maybe because he was in a very similar situation once with his child’s mother and after ditching her could not find a permanent replacement for his lost lover. Is it possible it runs in their blood? Artri never met his fraternal grandparents but Vari told him Artri’s grandmother Seinthe was without doubt most important person in her partner’s life. On family videos they reminded him to a great extent a kind
of the couple Kareema and Brinsley were, confiding in each other and deeply in love despite many years spent together.

Surely Vari could act irrationally overprotective sometimes and it was the reason he hated Vivianne even more now than ever, as the person who did not make his son happy. And all this despite beautiful grandchildren who left her womb in so quick the succession. Varian was proud of them and loved them but surely would prefer they had a different mother.

Because of his constant hostility against Vien Artri rarely invited his father for longer periods of time but could not keep him apart the whole time. Vari had the right to contact with his grandsons and it would be inhuman to shelter boys from him, even if his visits were making Vivianne nervous and upset.

Her girls also didn’t like what they christened as inspections. Artri knew that from eavesdropping only, because none of them would be bold enough to repeat this before him.

Artri knew if something bad will ever happen to him Varian would be perfect foster father to his orphaned sons but for their mother it would be most disastrous outcome. The physicist was almost afraid to ask what Vari could plan for her in such a case but there was one thing he was sure of. Whatever it is, it can never come true.

“What is it, master?” Vivianne stirred detecting his movement.

“What is it, master?” Vivianne stirred detecting his movement.

“Nothing, sweetling,” he said. “I’m just getting up. You can return to sleep. I’ll ask Heather to check on you when I’ll be absent. I have to take care of one important business but soon be back to admire most beautiful mother of three.”

“Okay,” she mumbled rolling over. Artri kissed the back of her dishevelled head. He should hurry lest Tommy would wait for him.
After Artri’s departure Vien napped alone in a huge bed. Her twin boys together with their older sibling were under the care of Lea and Heather. She hadn’t any milk for Wayne and Danny so they temporarily were giving her babies the synthesized fluid.

Soon though wet nurses will be employed to breastfeed them. Being natural, or at least as close to it as possible, was their father’s undisputable fetish. Artri demanded each boy must have his own exclusive feeder.

Vien had to agree. Well, in fact nobody asked her if such an arrangement will satisfy her. If it could be her own decision, she would prefer to give them bottles. In that way Vien could take care of all their needs herself not being depended on other females’ input. She didn’t want to complain though. If Vivianne would dare and her owner would refuse, it would be extremely humiliating. It was easier and safer to pretend the slave fully supports her master’s decision.

Even if Vivianne’s new boys were the fruit of forced pregnancy, she resolved to be the best parent for them as she could be. It was vital to her long-range plans to make them good people and valuable allies of her beloved Froglet. They deserved to have the caring mother just as much as Jaye did.

During the whole pregnancy, no matter how trying it was, Vien was sure she will breastfeed Wayne and Danny but after traumatic labour her lactation just perished. The doctors were giving Kennert’s mistress various stimulants of milk production but they worked only for the very short time. Just enough to give her children the taste but not much more. After a few days of constant struggle they gave up, claiming that there’s the blockade, they have no idea how to get rid of. Another time when the medics proved to be useless in so prosaic the challenge.

It was the bitter disappointment for Vivianne but Artri didn’t criticize her at all for inability of feeding his children. It was such a perfect occasion to humiliate her more but Kennert apparently didn’t want to use it.

He was good for her now, taking on himself the duties of her private nurse when she was still weak after the blood loss and huge physical exertion. Besides, he was showering her with various presents from fancy foods and flowers to the whole new wardrobe. Vien was receiving her master’s gifts with a complacent smile while in fact she was indifferent to his excessive generosity. As if it would make her forget what just happened. Well, it won’t.

Vien would prefer medical procedures helping her to recover faster, like for example regenerative healing of the tearing, left after the brutal operation of turning Danny in her womb. Instead of a fast recovery, like with her broken palm when she was in disfavour, Vien had to wear old-fashioned stitches for Goddess knows how long. Another not-so-subtle reminder Vivianne’s body does not belong to her and Artri can do with it whatever he wants.

But Vien won’t be asking him for anything. She will receive her fate with dignity and stoicism like becomes the sister of most respected Argossynian leader. For now, she stretched herself out in the sheets and decided to visit her children.
“Welcome! Mr Kennert, Mr Fisher, Mr Spalding.” The lawyer was all smiles. “I’m glad you three visited my humble office. I could barely believe it when I have received your request. Most famous scientists of our era!”

“Surely you’re not talking about me?” Stanley interfered. “I’m even more humble mental tech. But you should know about this.”

“Oh, you can’t underestimate your valuable person. You’re working with joining most exquisite minds one can find in whole habitable space. Everybody would envy you such a privilege, dear Mr. Spalding.”

“Okay, okay,” Artri had to intervene. He didn’t come here for the small talk and listening to exaggerated compliments. “Can we go straight to our business because, you know, Mr Rallave, as the father of young children I would prefer to spend the time with them when I’m not working.”

“Of course, Mr Kennert,” Rallave bowed once more which could be funny if it wasn’t infuriating. “Let’s come in. Please, sit. Do you want something to drink, perhaps?”

“No, we don’t,” Artri answered on behalf of his colleagues.

“Okay, so let’s start,” the lawyer became more serious at last.
“I have prepared already drafts of all the documents, that would be needed in our case. We will authorize them together so they can be signed by all interested parties, and after completing successfully the whole procedure, docs will be subsequently sent to the main archives. Documents will have the force of law since the moment of their signing. Questions?”

“None, I see. But I have the question, Mr. Kennert, for you. Are you sure you want to deprive your father of his natural privileges, the man who raised you to be as you are now, a successful scientist, admired by so many, your humble servant included?”

Artri only narrowed his eyes. The leap was enormous from previous irritating subservience to this almost impolite inquiry but he was in a relatively good mood now to not leave Rallave’s office immediately, together with his friends.

“Being frank, Rallave, I need not answer to your question but may as well do this. It’s not my children the whole fuss is all about. I don’t doubt Varian Kennert is well suited person to take care of my sons in case of my death or serious disablement but I will never let him put his hands on the person who birthed them. Is your curiosity fed enough by my statement or am I to move the case to one of your colleagues?”

“Oh, no. It won’t be necessary, Mr Kennert,” the lawyer’s former amiable self returned in a split second. “It was only, as you were graceful to name it, plain curiosity of an ordinary man. It’s not often people like me have an enormous pleasure to meet the members of top class Aristocracy of the Mind.”

It was Tommy who spoke next.
“Mr Rallave,” he said, “my friend is the very impatient man so I strongly recommend you to read those documents of yours or else you can really lose your lucrative job and I don’t mean just this transaction.”

The lawyer took the deep breath before reading at last.
“I, Artri Nathoo Kennert, the son of Varian Daniel Kennert and his mistress Klea Zanden Kennert,
born on Makantara, Galdanedian citizen I manage as follows: in case of my sudden death or serious mental or physical disablement, making me unfit to take care of my children, Jaye Branford Kennert, Wayne Artri Kennert and Daniel Brent Kennert, together with their mother Vivianne Tray Kennert, my rightful slave and presented mistress, bonded to me in traditional Makantaran binding ceremony and any future fruits her womb yet can bring me, I entrust them all to the joined custody of my friends and confidantes, Galdanedian citizens, Thomas Morton Fisher and Stanley Lee Spalding. If something makes one of them unable to uphold the challenge, the other can take the full responsibility for the well-being and safety of my beloved family.”

It was the main statement. After it went the long list of additional conditions and detailed stipulations. They were all discussed before between three friends, so it was a mere formality now to review them one more time before the signing of the document. It duly took place soon after.

Artri felt immediate relief he has done this at last. His girl will be relatively safe now and she won’t be robbed of their children’s presence in case something happens to him. Rallave warned him Varian soon will know about their agreement and may try to undermine its validity but the physicist didn’t mind. He was ready to show Vari his rightful place and in case of choosing between his parent and mistress had no slightest doubt who would win.
Looking as You Are

The whole statement sounded so grand when read aloud. Artri had his glorious family he was dreaming about for so long but for what a terrible price. His most precious baby hated him, deeming him her oppressor and abuser and now after birthing the twins judging his doings even more severely than before.

But Artri has just chosen what he thought was the best for the labouring slave. She was too submerged in her sufferings to let her decide about the further course of a complicated delivery. Someone had to be in charge and it happened to be him as the one more level-headed of the two.

She apparently could not forgive him several additional minutes of her contractions. It’s true Vien had to be in great pain but isn’t it unavoidable during the labour? Staying with him the girl knew what her future duties will be. Artri never tried to hide it. The birthing chamber on Perennis was one of the first places they visited together. He still remembered how afraid she was seeing all the restraints attached to the examination chairs and all other equipment.

Now, after three children, she seemed even more distant and guarded than ever. Artri craved desperately for this to change. He wanted her to confide in him, to trust him. Maybe telling her about the agreement they signed would make the difference. Maybe Vien, knowing Artri took care of freeing her from the terrifying Varian’s shadow, could understand at last he’s not her enemy and has only the good of their family in mind.

When Artri entered women’s room the animated talk they had, ceased immediately. Only little Jaye, unaware of all the pressure, ran to him spontaneously.

“Daddy, daddy, where have you been?” Artri’s oldest child started to talk, using first short sentences when he was about fourteen months old, very early as for the boy, and since then his linguistic abilities were expanding rapidly. Now, not yet two, he was only sometimes simplifying more complicated constructions or longer words but apart from that Jaye was talking like boys two times his senior. His little genius in the making. Apart from the excellent genetics Artri knew to whom he should give the credit for his son’s fast development.

Vivianne was talking or reading for him almost constantly, especially when she was feeding Jaye and later to make up to him the lack of her milk. Only worst ailings could keep her apart from the boy. And it paid admirably. Despite being very young she was devoted, responsible and loving mother. The other girls of her age, or at least most, would surely leave their children under the care of trusted servants to enjoy life, sex, parties and pretty clothes. Vivianne was nothing like them. It was how she has been raised by her sister on that poor, yet proud planet.

Artri lifted his son from the floor hugging the boy, while Jaye put his still plump little arms around the scientist’s neck. At least the child was happy to see him.

“I’m so sorry I wasn’t there to say good morning to my baby boy but I have a very important business to attend together with your uncles Tommy and Stanny.”

“Where’s uncle Tan?” Jaye was immediately interested. “Want to play with Mully!”

“He’s not there. But they’ll visit you soon.”

“Yesterday?”

“Tomorrow,” Artri smiled. “And what about your new brothers? Were you talking to them today?”
“Nah,” Jaye sounded disgusted. “They’re only sleeping. But one time I saw baby Wen yawned and
you know what, daddy? He has no teeth!”

“I’m sure he will grow a few soon,” Artri answered with a serious face, “no less pretty than your
little pearls, I hope.”

Then Artri put Jaye on the ground again to look at his mother.
In contrast to her flourishing son she looked weakened and pale and had deep shadows under her
eyes. Kennert noticed Vien was wearing one of new dresses she has been given lately, turquoise
made of shiny silk. At least it was a good sign but the flowing fabric was mercilessly accentuating
her still prominent belly.

Artri immediately felt terribly, like he missed something very important. He was caring too much
about his wounded ego and not enough of endangered health of his baby. He will summon the
doctor for tomorrow and will make him do something. After all, he’s not paying them for the things
that can’t be done.

The best way to discretely check her temperature was to kiss the girl on the forehead which he did.
Luckily she wasn’t feverish. Rather opposite. Her skin was cool and covered with cold sweat.

“Come, darling, I’ll take you to bed,” Artri said.

“It’s the middle of the day, sir,” it wasn’t exactly objection, rather loosely thrown remark.

“I know, but you have to rest as much as you can. You, well, you don’t look good.”

“That I know of. You need not tell me this, my lord.” She pouted. Perfect! Just now she decided to
be difficult.

“Not in that sense, sweetie,” he sighed. “Now be the good girl and let me take you. You need to lay
down a bit and then you can return, if such will be your wish.”

“I want to go with mama!” Jaye didn’t want to part with her.


“No!” The boy was close to tears.
In no time Heather was with him.
“If your father says later, it means later,” she said. “And now maybe you want a lemonade? Or ice
cream?”

“Ice cream!” Jaye in a split second forgot about his sorrow. Artri looked at the girl with gratitude.
“See,” he said to the mistress in his arms, “everything will be all right during your absence.”
She didn’t protest this time.
Life after disaster

She was so ill, so weak and tired. It was like her strong and healthy newborns took most of the life force from their mother and she was slowly fading instead of regaining her strength. Soon their father may look for more cheerful lover, ready to oust her from much desired place of her master’s favourite. As the bonded female Vien couldn’t be sold or given to anyone else, but they can always end her life prematurely or she can die in a perfectly natural way in next childbirth. Lack of lactation means Vivianne may conceive much sooner than after Jaye. It was a terrifying possibility. Now she was safe and for some time will be but that moment will come, eventually.

“Why are you so sad?” Artri asked tucking her in the blanket and gathering pillows around the slave. “We have beautiful, fantastic children. You must recover for them. So many people need you. And me, most of them all.”

Manipulation. It was all shameless manipulation. If he really cared about her, he wouldn’t risk her life like that. These were only empty words. The trap she has fallen in. And still was falling. Because she wanted to believe him. She wanted this to be true. But it wasn’t. And that’s why he can never know.

“Do you want something hot to drink?” Kennert asked. “Or to eat? Or, I don’t know, maybe you would like music to cheer you up a little. What my mistress commands?”

“I want Jaye,” she said.

“I thought you would want to abstain for the while from your usual duties…” Kennert looked at her doubtfully.

“My boy is not the duty. He’s just a walking pleasure. May I have him, my lord?”

Artri didn’t look happy because of Vivianne’s demand but agreed. “I’ll check if he finished his ice cream and if so I’ll let him come.”

Artri secretly hoped Vien would like to spend time with him. Only with him. But she has chosen Jaye. Again.

Art didn’t need clearer message he’s definitely not wanted here. Artri’s only consolation was his slave needs him to survive. But nothing more.

Now he could only watch his beloved cuddling with their child with such great enthusiasm like they haven’t seen each other for months. The boy was squeaking loudly with delight.

It was pathetic to be jealous of one’s own child but Artri couldn’t help it. He was robbed of these experiences once at the beginning of his life and now was rejected again. The physicist barely stopped himself from silencing the little one and telling him not to tire his mother too much but it would be entirely unjust. Jaye was giving her life and strength, Artri, it seemed, was doing exactly opposite.

“Don’t you want to accept the wet nurses I have chosen for Wayne and Danny?” Artri asked. Vien, who was feeling slightly better now, at least physically, was just eating breakfast. The girl regained
partly her previous appetite which was the good sign, even if the melancholy hasn’t left her yet.

“I trust your judgement, my lord.” Vien answered. “So I think it’s unnecessary. I’ll meet them when they’ll arrive.”

“Okay, as you wish.” He nodded and went to take care of his business.

Arlie and Hafia, they had only first names, were inconspicuous creatures with soft voices and calm demeanour. Girls wanted to kneel before her and, when Vivianne forbade them, to kiss her hands at least. It had to be the influence of an intimidating presence at Vien’s side, still in full regalia after returning from the city.
The girl sighed internally but said nothing about it, ignoring the man as best as she could. She welcomed new women with the few warm words and handed them over to Lea who was to take care of the rest.

Even this undemanding activity made her tired, and she had to sit down for the while.
Living blind

Weeks past but Varney wasn’t that eager to give them his blessing. It was six already and was near seven now and the medic was still reluctant. Vien should be glad because avoiding master’s bed meant no immediate danger of another pregnancy but at the same time she couldn’t afford him roaming somewhere else in search of satisfaction.

Her women, each one, were ready to fill in for her if she only let them. But they could not offer themselves to the master of the house. It was mistress’s job to suggest temporary replacement.

Artri had to admit Vien was a little nicer to him lately. Not that she wasn’t polite before, even if holding the grudge, because Artri knew she did, the girl was showing him usual respect and never refused to fulfill his orders. But now it was something else. The man could tell the difference between good manners, obligatory for Galdanedian mistress aspiring to perfection in her role and real warmth in the way she was treating him.

Was it possible pretty Argossynian was ready to forgive at last? It had to be too far fetched presumption and he shouldn’t hope too much but Artri could not stop dreaming, especially after she smiled to him. How long it was he saw that kind of smile intended for the girl’s master? Most probably when she had Reni’s bastard in her belly thinking it’s theirs.

He told Varney to not act harshly as before but to give Vien more time to adjust and to feel no pressure regarding her return to intimate activities. It would be ideal if the girl would suggest it on her own initiative.

And when Artri saw that special smile his hopes raised high. He could not stop himself from touching her. It was nothing unusual, after all they were sleeping together, brother and sister mode since twins were born, Artri on heavy inhibitors to throughly eliminate unwished for urges which couldn’t come in the way. He owed her at least that much for the vast riches she was the source of and for his not always sufficiently supportive attitude.

She was in one of her ordinary dresses, in which was helping with Wayne and Danny or playing with Jaye. But that normality had its charm, as something speaking of domesticity, established routine, things that cannot be taken away from them.

Artri kissed her hand on both sides but abstained from more until he will know for sure.
““I see you have recovered pretty well,” he said. “I’m glad it’s all behind us. I felt guilty of your aillings and I actually was.”

“It’s inconsequential now,” Vien smiled again. “But my doctor still thinks me unfit to… you know…”

“Yes, I may guess. And what of it?” Will it happen now? Will she ask him to intervene?

“Well, I thought… in the meantime… maybe you would like to accept the offer of the service my girls could provide, whichever one you would like, my lord?”

Her unexpected words had brought him back down to earth. For the moment Artri wondered if he perhaps misheard.
“What do you suggest?” He asked stifling his rising anger.

“My girls are ready for you, master, if you only wish,” Vivianne’s voice was firm but there was the shadow of fear in her cobalt blue eyes, like she knew already it was a grave mistake.

“Who do you think I am?” he seethed, “Mad dog in the rut? To give it whatever bitch is available?”

“No, I…” she backed off. “I didn’t mean to offend you, my lord.” She was close, so very much close but out of his reach like on another planet or maybe even in another galaxy. Now the girl has shown him what Artri really means to her. Her absolute lack of jealousy spoke volumes of Vivianne’s attitude towards him.

“If I wanted to use one of these females,” he said with almost unnatural calm, “I would do this long time ago, not asking for your acceptance. Now forgive me, mistress. I have to leave for the Centre. Guess I’m already late.”

It was the lie but Artri Kennert didn’t mind Vivianne believes him or not. He left before the girl had the chance to respond.
“So who is this happy creature?” Leandra was bold enough to ask, the rest of girls listening intently.

Vivianne looked at them for the while and eventually said. “I’m sorry for bringing you bad news but my lord is not interested in that kind of service from any of you.”

Loud sighs, of relief from Heather and disappointment from all the rest welcomed her words. Hafia, who was still keeping Wayne at her breast, was first to comment.

“Isn’t our master of the house incredibly gentlemanly? He will wait for you, mistress, everyone can tell!”

Vien said nothing. She didn’t want to upset them, being already terribly upset herself. Artri’s sudden outburst took her by surprise and she has got no ideas how to cope with it and what to do to placate him after what accidentally was some kind of grave offence.

She could easily recall how his eyes darkened immediately, giving out anger and hurt mixed together.
What has she done wrong? After all it was standard behaviour of Galdanedian mistress. The man himself was teaching her once about their duties and it was one of them. If Artri wasn’t interested, he should just say it, not making that great deal of something so uncomplicated. Men, most probably she will never understand how these creatures function.

After leaving Cycads Valley Artri installed himself in his empty apartments in Centre’s vicinity. In comparison with warmth filled mansion, his perfect family was occupying, rooms here were sterile and devoid of life but he had no other choice. Art had to move out temporarily to avoid more bitter words or even outright violence.

He had it enough. Enough of constant pinning, waiting for who knows what. This relationship was doomed to failure from the beginning. Only he was too blinded by his initial fascination to see it. Vivianne wasn’t material for his permanent partner at all. Just like Vai before her. She tried or maybe rather seemed to try but it was all artificial and calculated from a to z.

He will let the girl remain the mother of his children and only presented mistress. None of the privileges won’t be taken from the woman, who has birthed him three such wonderful creatures and can still have more. But he won’t be harassing her for feelings she’s apparently unable to deliver.

Surely there must be the woman who could love him unconditionally, wanting nothing more than his presence. Not an ambitious one like Francesca. Someone more like Rissa, sweet and caring. Artri was sure he met hundreds potentially suitable females.

He didn’t want them because they were too easy and too obvious with their adoring glances but has chosen instead extremely reluctant, rebellious thing. And for now, before he’ll be able to choose again, and this time better, he can have as much fun as he can get.

Tommy always chided him for what he called irrational behaviour. “When you’re providing for the slave and keep her satisfied,” he said, “it’s not her business with whoever else you meet or sleep. She has to accept it.”

It’s time to make it his best friend’s way.
An unannounced visit of the Black-maned surprised Tommy. “I didn’t expect to see you, Nat, that time of the week and day,” he said. “We all were sure you have buried yourself completely in all these nappies, onesies and so on. Kertie says you will soon breastfeed them yourself. Is it true?”

“Very funny, Fisher,” Artri was not amused. “Instead of stupid jokes better tell me brother where can I find a bit of decent entertainment. You’re surely the best informant in such matters.”

“Artri Kennert wants entertainment? Mm, that’s knew. Or rather… is it possible my prodigal friend has returned from the dead?” Tommy’s eyes were glowing with excitement. “I mean, you know, I’m not the enemy of that Argossynian creature. Actually opposite, I always liked her, she’s a good girl and very pleasant but for the men like us one partner for life is surely far from enough. Especially now when she’s busy with children, she gave birth to. You cannot blame yourself for wanting more than that.”

“Of course,” Artri nodded. “And that’s why I am here. So, where you can lead us?”

“Well, there’s the ball at astrologers and we have constant invitation to their events. It has already begun but no one will blame us for coming a little late. What do you think, coordinator?”

“Astrophysicists will do,” Artri momentarily agreed, “so let’s mingle, Fisher and we will see what would become of it.”
Balance of power

All of it was terribly disconcerting. For the first time since having Jaye Artri didn’t return for the
night, nor informed her how long he will be out and why. She probably knew why but still it wasn’t
like him at all.

Maybe Vien should be satisfied being able to spend the night in bed only with her froglet and with
no one else to interfere. Jaye was obviously happy because of the arrangement. He didn’t ask about
his father. Not even once.

When the slave woke up Kennert was absent still. And there was no message from him. Certainly
nothing bad happened, Vien was consoling herself. If it did, surely she would know about it already
from guards or Artri’s friends.

He had to feel offended deeper than Vien expected and it was hard to tell how long his hiding can
last. It was childish. Silly. And dangerous for her. Exactly the thing Vien tried to avoid. It could be
only the excuse to justify looking for someone else. Was it possible the man was already bored with
her services? Has she lost her charm for him? There was no way she could tell.

Throughout the evening, Artri did not shy away from graciously accepting the evidence of adoration
surrounding him. For a long time, he wasn’t that much socially involved, so news of his sudden
availability spread widely, causing quite the sensation at Galdanedian halls.

Kennert didn’t plan to go with anybody to one of the back rooms. He was still on his heavy
medication so it would be pointless to even try. But it was nice to resume his previous position, to be
the center of attention again, to take the advantage his social standing, beauty and wealth were
always giving him.

Artri was born to rule lesser beings, not for suffering the whims of one ungrateful female. No other
woman was honoured as she and no other would be that careless to throw it all away not once but
many times. Unfortunately, her genetics was unique and therefore irreplaceable for him but still Vien
could be kept as a carrier, in perfect seclusion to avoid trouble. It can be arranged. And nobody
would have the right to interfere. She will soon see what it means to spurn, like it was nothing, the
gift Artri offered her.

But for now he was flirting, smiling and even laughing, determined to have a good time and to not let
remorse and regret to ruin his mood.

The physicist returned to his mistress in the evening the next day, after dinner with Tommy and Sara,
Vien welcomed him with her infuriating calm acceptance. She didn’t even ask where he had been.
The girl just curtsied with fallow head bowed, looking beautiful and vulnerable. Lovely.
“You have summoned me, my lord?” Her voice was devoid of emotion.
“Yes, I did,” Artri made no move to be closer. After changing the implant this morning his hormones
levels were already shifting. Her smell was interesting but Artri couldn’t touch the girl. Not yet.
“I have arranged your next examination for tomorrow so please prepare yourself for nine in the
morning. It will be all. You can go now.”

If Vien was surprised by so sudden dismissal she didn’t show it.
“As you wish, sir,” she said, outrageously indifferent. Obstinate as ever but soon she will know such
behaviour can lead her only to nowhere.
Vivianne’s next entrance ceremony went well and with no major disturbances. They both were an established couple now so what could go wrong? And it didn’t. But for the first time Artri had been distant, he even looked slightly bored like there was more duty for him in it than joy and impatiently awaited pleasure.

After the reunion night Vien received new and many valuable gifts, mainly jewelry and articles of clothing but also all Artri’s works in chronological order for the slave to study in her leisure time. She would be thrilled with the latter, Vien was asking her master for them since long, if not his distanced, almost cold behaviour. Was it possible he was still fuming after her unfortunate proposal? She wanted to explain herself but was too afraid to ask.

While Vien was admitted to her owner’s bed her cycle was infertile yet but soon Vivianne’s organism was ready again and she conceived her next baby almost exactly four months after birthing the twins.

Doctors weren’t too satisfied with the outcome. They tried to convince the physicist he should wait the whole year or at least the half of it, for the safety reasons, but it was him who had a final say in the matter.

Their reservations were rendered null and void when after nine weeks Vivianne’s fifth pregnancy ended with a miscarriage. It happened without slightest warning. She has awakened in blood-soaked sheets. There was nothing to save from the disaster. Kennert’s mistress has lost what they identified as identical male twins.

When Artri arrived she was already washed, tended to and was waiting for him alone in their huge bed. The slave looked very pale, apparently after all the shock and blood loss.

“I’m sorry,” Vien whispered, eyeing her owner with apprehension. She wanted to sit while welcoming him but Artri prevented it just in time.

“Don’t overstrain yourself,” he said. “You have to recover as soon as possible. Your duties are far too important to neglect them for long.”

It was a relief of sorts to hear such words. In her extremely disturbed state of mind, she feared Artri would like to get rid of her after the miscarriage. It would be a perfect occasion for the ultimate move like that.

Up till now she heard many gossips about her master’s adventurous behaviour, about the women connected to him this way or another, and yes, her former compatriot May Tuner’s name constantly appeared among them.

Vien never saw them together after the disastrous costume party at Merrivers but it meant nothing. They could meet in May’s master’s home and with his blessing. For Kertie it would be a perfect occasion to cement his position in Kennert’s team. As Double X-er May had to be interesting to him for obvious reasons. Surely she knew how to be funny and witty. And scheming. Vien had no way to stop her or any other females from undermining her position. Now she wasn’t healthy enough to act. And after recovering she will be impregnated again to move her out of the way. Temporarily and one day maybe finally.

Vivianne’s darkest forebodings were just coming true. She recalled Sara’s words she heard once,
what seemed to her now the whole lifetime ago.

You’re making a grave mistake. He won’t be yours in the slightest. It’s you who would be his and literally. He won’t be your partner but your owner and your master. And you know already what he’s capable of.
Under the weather

After leaving Vivianne’s sickbed Artri went to meet her very much worried doctors.

“Why are you sitting here like at the funeral?” He was determined to not show them he is moved at all by what just happened.

“You surely saw things like that many times already. It can always occur with the offspring of modificated man and a regular woman. It was exactly like that with our first child and we’ve had the perfectly normal Jaye, Wayne and Danny after them.”

“It’s great you are in a good mood despite your loss, Mr Kennert,” it was Ian who answered him first. “But let’s be frank, if it wasn’t natural miscarriage we would have to end it.”

“How come?” Now Artri was nearly stunned by what he heard.

“Well, first your young slave wouldn’t be able to endure another twin pregnancy after so short the break. But also these children were conjoined. The Siamese twins. We haven’t told the mother, it could add to her stress and shock.”

“How it happened you didn’t know earlier?”

“Well, they were tiny and one was hiding behind another. It all looked perfectly normal. We couldn’t detect them like we detected dizygotic twins before, for obvious reasons. It would be possible to find out if we knew what to look for but nobody expected your slave’s another multiple pregnancy. Such things are extremely rare.”

“I see,” Artri acknowledged Ian’s explanations. “So I have another question. How long it takes for my slave to conceive again and be able to keep the baby?”

“Mr. Kennert!” Ian was visibly shocked. But Varney said nothing.

“What’s so outrageous in being well informed?” Art asked with what superficially looked like wide-eyed innocence.

This time it was Varney, who answered.

“It’s the best to not wait long with another try,” he said, sure of himself.

“Usually it is like Varn said,” the other medic commented, frowning. “But not in this case. The woman, you both are talking about so carelessly, is extremely traumatised and stressed. She needs therapy first and most probably through regeneration of her uterus for another pregnancy to be safe for the mother and child. Impregnating her again after so short the time and with no improvements to her reproductive system after everything it went through is like asking for the ultimate disaster. Unless it’s exactly what you want to achieve, Mr. Kennert.” Ian spat the last words with venom.

“Dear doctor,” Artri responded calmly, “surely you don’t accuse me of plotting to kill my beloved mistress. I assure you nothing could be further from my true intentions. If I wanted her dead, our law gives me legal possibility to end her life with my own hands whenever and however I would like. I need no alleged reason to hide behind. I may be many things but a coward is not one. My only aim, Mr Vanellan, is more healthy children and very much living mistress to help me raise them. After being technically half orphan myself I would never deprive my boys of their mother. Never.”

“If so, you should agree to what I have just suggested,” the medic looked at Art defiantly.
“And if I wouldn’t?”

“There’s no need to decide just yet. First our patient must fully recover,” Varney interfered, “and only then we can return to our conversation to decide what would be the best to do next. I guess you can agree with me?”

“I may, of course,” Artri said. “And you?”

“At least for the time being, yes” Vanellan nodded.

“Okay, so it’s settled. I thank you for now, gentlemen. We will be in contact as usual. Now I must return to my baby to console her some more. You know I can’t stand poor sweetie crying.” With these words he left them, not waiting for further response.

After finishing with the medics Artri went straight to his mistress. She was just back from the restroom.

“Why are you walking alone?” The physicist asked. You should call someone to escort you.

“It was an early miscarriage, master. I’m not strictly bedridden and can take care of myself,” she answered resolutely. Too much resolutely as for his tastes. It wasn’t the same pliant, afraid creature he found in this bed after returning home from the Centre. She had to sense Artri doesn’t plan to draw the consequences and isn’t angry or even sad, therefore she can safely play her little game of a devoted slave.

Artri wanted to scold her severely for this but one look at the girl, still deathly pale, and he relented. Someone had to be adult here.

“I know you prefer to act like the strong woman no matter how you really feel but with me you need not to pretend,” he said gathering her close.

“And I want no harm to become to my most precious girl, for the sake of me and my… our children.”

It was an enormous pleasure to kiss her cool cheeks. Artri didn’t even know he wanted her that much. No matter how hard he tried, no matter how devoutly he was adored, how fiercely these women were fighting for his acceptance none of them would give him the fraction of fulfillment and satisfaction Vivianne could deliver with one look, even reserved and wary. One word or equivalent of it and Artri will be her most humble servant for ever. But he won’t be begging. Begging is beneath him.

“Lay down,” he almost choked. “I’ll go to meet the children and will return to you. And when you would like to go anywhere, please summon me or one of your girls.”

“Yes, master,” she whispered, making herself comfortable under the blanket. It was hard to guess if she’s relieved or disappointed by his sudden retreat.
She watched him go, her beautiful and charming master. When Kennert was out of the room, the girl could let her tears to fall at last. Vien could not afford to let him see more of her weakness. She has shown the man enough of it when he came here for the first time. Being weak in front of the monster who was feeding on it was the worst idea. Especially now when she lost the most important of a few advances, she ever had in The XY Zone. Her exclusiveness for him.

The strategy of keeping Artri constantly on the edge apparently failed and Vien had no idea how to proceed further. To tell him everything? First, he will never believe her and even if he would it won’t change anything for the best. Rather opposite.

She had trusted and devoted servants and most lovely children and yet was feeling so alone with her responsibility for them all. It was so tempting to confess all her fears, insecurities and doubts to the only person who was mighty enough to help her with them. She craved to have a real partner like Nelly or Chriss got, not barely disguised enemy and a prison guard.

She had to dry her tears soon, lest Kennert, who has promised to return, will notice she was crying and will ask Vien again why she’s unhappy with him.

When Artri entered children’s room’s his younger sons were sleeping peacefully, each at their feeder’s breast so he didn’t disturb them. In an adjacent room Lea and Heather tried in vain to placate sobbing Jaye.

“What happened, darling? Why are you crying?” Art asked kneeling beside him.
“What’s mama? I wanna go to her!” Seeing his father little boy cried even louder.

“Come, sweetie. Mama is okay, only exhausted. She will come to you as soon as she will rest. Now I’ll take you to bed. You want me to?”

“Yes, daddy.” Jaye wiped his eyes with the sleeve of his pajama in exactly the same manner his mother used to do it when upset.
“Will you be sleeping with me?”

“No the whole night, no, but I’ll stay until you will fall as sleep. I’ll sing you the lullaby my nannies were singing for me when I was a little boy like you are now.”

“Daddy, but you can’t sing!”
“You’re right, not really. But I can try. And you can help me.”
Maybe the singing went out not that bad or the boy was tired with crying because he gave up and soon was snoring quietly on Artri’s breast, with little fingers tangled in his father’s long hair.

It took an effort to extricate himself from Jaye’s firm hold. Luckily the child only stirred but didn’t wake up.

Art thought everyone is already sleeping but when the man snuck out from the room, where he left his little boy, Heather came to him, asking for the few words in private.

“What is it?” Her sudden boldness surprised Artri. Heather usually was afraid of him and it was
unheard of the girl starting first the contact with the master of the house.

“It’s about our mistress,” she raised to Art her pleading eyes. “Please, sir, don’t be too harsh to her. She has suffered enough because of the miscarriage itself.”

“Heather,” he said softly, “I’m extremely pleased by your devotion to the woman you serve but she, who is the other half of my body and soul, doesn’t need your special intervention. I’ll take care of my sweet angel regardless of what you or anyone else may say.”

“I thank you, sir,” the girl didn’t look like fully convinced. “But the last time… I mean on Perennis…”

“It’s not your business what happened on Perennis. What were the orders you received, girl?”

“Never talk about it,” she whispered.

“Exactly. Next time I will punish you for touching the subject I forbid to address. You’re lucky I’m not in the mood now for enforcing the discipline. You can go to sleep Heather. Your mistress is safe.”

“Yes, Mr. Kennert. And thank you!” The girl knew better than to linger against his explicitly stated wishes. She ran to join her colleagues in women’s chambers.

Chapter End Notes

“... she, who is the other half of my body and soul, doesn’t need… intervention.” This part is the paraphrase of words used by one Polish king, Sigismund II Augustus, answering to the letter sent by his mother-in-law, Anne of Bohemia and Hungary. She was asking him in it for better treatment of his wife Elisabeth, whom young king was purposefully neglecting.
Vien wasn’t sleeping yet when Artri entered for the third time today. Now he intended to stay.
“Were you waiting for me, little Squirrel?” He asked.
“Yes, master,” she answered from under the blanket tucked up to her chin. “I wanted to apologize again for my fault, I…”

“It’s okay,” Art sat on the edge of the bed. In the dimmed light it could seem the girl was crying some time ago but he couldn’t be sure. Apart from this the young slave looked utterly wasted, her features were sharpened like in a constant pain and there were deep shadows under her eyes.

“It wasn’t your fault in the slightest. Doctors haven’t told you? Probably they did but I’ll repeat just in case. It’s the baby. It was unable to live. Part of mixed pregnancies is always destined to perish that way. It’s normal, and it happens. I’m sorry it had to hit you but such things are unpredictable.”

There was visible relief in her whole appearance and the slave’s body relaxed at last a little. Like it was wound up before, awaiting what? Heavy scolding or whipping? It was clear not only Heather deemed Art capable of punishing the woman on the day of her miscarriage. And what had he done to earn such a terrible opinion?

After what happened on Perennis? Wasn’t it so with Reni’s bastard he had made everything to diminish Vivianne’s stress and suffering? It was she, who has turned away from him first, not otherwise. But now Vien needed him again, and it was the most important thing.

“Are you hungry?” Artri inquired. “It’s late but I can make you the light meal. Or thirsty? It’s important for you to be sufficiently hydrated.”

“I can take tea, master, if you would be that nice.”

“Good idea. It will warm you from the inside,” Artri nodded and went to fulfill his mistress’s order.

When handing her the cup with a hot beverage Artri could notice Vivianne’s nearly ice-cold fingers. She needed additional blanket and someone to warm her from the outside. Luckily there was one such person, ready for the job.

Artri rearranged pillows for her to sit comfortably and for the while watched the slave sipping hot infusion. Vien was keeping the cup in a tight grip as if being afraid she could drop it or trying to hide her hands are shaking a little, but most probably both. Artri could feel her unease.

It was unbearable. Was he really that terrible for her, to make the poor creature that skittish and afraid of him? Yes, it’s true Artri wanted her to be jealous but except for this he did nothing to frighten his girl.

Everybody was treating her with respect, they met all her physical needs with the utmost meticulousness. She had full control over their children’s upbringing. Vien has just lost the baby and had the right to be sad. Sad, yes, but not terrified. She had no reasons to be. Artri already told her it wasn’t anyone’s fault, least of all her own.

“Not playing coy anymore?” He could not stop himself from asking.

“What do you mean, sir?” Her voice wasn’t trembling but the hold on the cup tightened even more. She was so easy to read.

“Nothing,” Artri smiled. He knew everything he wanted to know.
Vien didn’t like how her owner’s face transformed itself into an indulgent smile. She knew, almost every other woman would become euphoric after seeing something like that, addressed to her personally, but Vien was far more experienced than most with the man.

“Here, give me this,” he whispered. “There’s no tea left in the cup. You want more?”

Only now Vien realised her knuckles were almost white where they were holding the vessel. Definitely she should control herself better.
After carrying out the empty cup Artri returned to the bedroom. “I’ll change to something more suitable and will join you in a minute,” he said.

“Do you want to sleep with me, sir?” Vien blurted before had the chance to think.

“Oh,” the physicist stopped half step. “So we are on formal terms now? I have become accustomed to you refusing to use my name, but this is something new.”

“I’m sorry, master. I didn’t want to be mean,” Vien quickly emended herself.

“It was automatic.”

“I see. And answer to your question is yes. You need someone to take care of your sweet person until you will regain your strength. Unless you don’t want me to…”

“No, no,” she blurted. “It’s not that. I’m just surprised.”

“Ivvi, you shouldn’t be. It’s the sadness we share so in whom we can find better consolation than in ourselves. I want to hold you to mourn our loss together.”

He had no right to sound like that. He had no right to be that good and full of understanding. If her master would be mean, angry and cruel Vivianne would be more at ease with it, knowing she has to endure and be strong in the face of unveiled abuse but this was making her infinitely more helpless.

Artri was thousand times more dangerous in this disguise than in any other. It was virtually impossible to keep your shields on when dealing with such forgiving, magnanimous and affectionate creature. It’s not that Artri Kennert wasn’t honest. In that moment he might be or it could be another manipulation of his, or the mixture of both. One could never tell for sure with the man.

But one thing was undisputable here. Whoever knew how his deep interest in them tasted would sacrifice everything else to regain it after it was taken from them or, in more hopeless circumstances, rather die trying than live without it. Luckily Vien had her children. And for their sake she has to survive even this, her owner’s merciless tenderness and sympathy.

Because she didn’t protest Artri has changed quickly in night clothes. He preferred to sleep naked but tonight it was out of question.

It was a wonderful feeling to cradle the girl in his embraces. Not so long ago Artri promised himself not to pursue Vivianne’s reciprocality. Tonight he was not so sure it was a good decision. Maybe he resolved to give up too quickly, maybe there was still the chance for them. Especially now with his lover broken and suffering. It was possible she will seek refuge and comfort in him and will find far more in the end.

“Sweet infinity,” he said. “I didn’t know you have lost so much weight! No wonder you shivered, there’s nothing to keep you warm.”

“I’m sorry, master. It was morning sickness apparently. I had nothing like that with the… with Jaye but with the twins it has changed. I know I should tell my doctors…”

“Poor baby, it was me who should take care about your welfare. I must apologize for not paying
enough attention to my slave’s health problems. You’re skin and bones, darling. We have to feed you up. Without the sufficient amount of body fat it’s hard to even think about next conception!”

“I’m sorry,” Vien repeated mechanically. It started to sound annoying.

“There is nothing you must be sorry for,” Artri stressed. “None of this was your fault. Now better sleep. You need it as much as food.”


“Always!” Art agreed.

“Can I see him?” she whispered.

Artri didn’t like this question but couldn’t show it for obvious reasons.
“It was the embryo, not yet fully formed, you surely know how nine weeks old baby looks. And lethally deformed. I would prefer to not show them to you if I could help it.”

“I see,” miraculously Vien didn’t protest. “But can we bury him with his… with his half sister?”

In a different situation Artri would be furious hearing similar suggestion, to equal his legal offspring with damned bastard, but now he felt strangely tolerant of her silly, sentimental feelings.

“If it will make you feel even slightly better I have nothing against it,” he said kissing slave’s hand, now noticeably warmer.
Heather

Heather was watching her mistress and the best friend with worry. She sometimes wondered if it wouldn't be better after all without Mr. Kennert's constant presence around. It was true the man was good with children. He was also charming, amusing host, all the other servants adored, basking in his attention when he was kind enough to show it. How was it possible only Heather alone was impregnable to his appeal?

The way the man was influencing her mistress's moods was the source of Heather's unease since the day Vivianne emerged from her master's apartments still pale and weak.

Outwardly they resembled the pair which admitted her to the service, but it was the poor facsimile of a loving couple she was privileged to meet. How was it possible nobody noticed? Not little Jaye, who was beside himself with joy to have both his parents available for him again whenever the boy wanted. He soon invited himself to their bedroom for the nights and has never been sent away.

Heather was far more hard to deceive than the child or her colleagues, enchanted by the master's expansive personality. It didn't escape her attention Vien was uncomfortable with the arrangement. She was hiding it and but sometimes, when the master wasn't looking, Vivianne's insecurity was showing.

Heather didn't know what's happening when they were alone. Did the master torment her or coerced her to do the things she wasn't comfortable doing? The mistress was pliant and unable to refuse him anything. Heather never saw Vien naked since the moment they left her in his bed, as the returning owner commanded. He may as well beat her every day and nobody could notice.

Sometimes sharing one's misery with a friendly spirit may help so Heather was ready to use the first suitable occasion to talk to her friend and ask what she can do for her.

When it happened at last Vien only hugged her and said. “You need not worry, Heather. No harm is done to me. We have to wait until the master will make me useful again and then hopefully he will it will leave us in peace, like we would be now, if not for my unfortunate miscarriage.”

“Oh, but I can see it’s not as idyllic as you try to portray it.” Heather was not ready to give up. “There must be something I could do to make you feel better.”

“There’s nothing anyone can do for me, Heather. I have chosen my fate by myself and must alone bear the consequences. My close friend was warning me, my own insides were warning me, but I didn’t want to see the danger. I was careless, deceived by foolish hope and false self-assurance. And now there is no turning back. I won’t endanger any of you showing the smallest trace of disobedience to the orders I’m given. Hopefully, my next pregnancy won’t be that trying as with Danny and Wayne and we will stay together for some time at least. The only thing I may demand of you is to take care of my children if something bad happens to me.”

Vivianne’s confession sounded almost like the last will and it gave Heather cold thrills. Her beloved mistress behaved like someone who already heard her sentence and is only waiting for the term of its fulfillment. It wasn't asking about if, only about when. And yet she told Heather to not worry. How could she?

Talking to Mr Kennert himself would be useless but what about…

“Maybe I could talk to your friends, mistress,” she groaned. “They are legal partners of our master’s friends. They can talk some sense to him. Or at least may try. We cannot let you be led like the lamb
to the slaughter, doing nothing.”

Vivianne smiled. It was only the pale imitation of her old mischievous smile. “Little Heather,” she said, “I appreciate the intention but I can’t agree to any of this. It’s too dangerous. Besides, you must stay in my master’s good graces, remember he can always sell you. And I’m sure he will do this if you would dare to interfere. Nobody has the right to step between that predator and his chosen prey.”

Seeing her servant’s red face, close to tears because of her frustrating powerlessness, Vien embraced the girl again. It was a paradox of sorts; it was Heather who was supposed to console her mistress, not the other way. Both girls were standing like that for the long time taking comfort from each other.

They didn’t notice somebody was watching.
“Will you let me take a minute of your precious time, boss?” The first person welcoming him home after one day absence wasn’t Vivianne, as Artri hoped, but one of his guards. It was the boy from the latest recruitment. Older than Thad but still fairly young. His name was Nod, Nod Yopal. The young man was dutiful, even-tempered and quite indistinctive person but Art was satisfied with the service provided by him.

“Yes, what is it, Noddy?” Artri wasn’t keen to delay his meeting with the mistress. He was again so much accustomed to her nearly constant presence that felt acutely the necessity of slightly longer separation. She was still skittish but things seemed to progress in the right direction. Viv just needed a lot of patience and a persistent courting, which was undisputable pleasure to deliver.

“It’s about the mistress, boss,” Nod clarified.
“That’s interesting,” Artri was intrigued. “Come to my office and you can tell me.”

In the cabinet the physicist detached ceremonial neurowhip and took off his jacket and gloves. “So?” He looked at the boy expectantly.

“You know, sir, it looks like our mistress is plotting something behind your back with one of her maidservants.”

“What do you mean by plotting?” Artri snorted. “They feel attachment one to another. All of them share the sentiment, I guess. It’s nothing new. Something else?”

“But they were discussing something apart from the rest, like they didn’t want to be heard by them. I could swear it wasn’t innocent chatting. And they were embracing one another for the long time after.”

“Which one it was?” Artri asked even if he already knew.

“Little Heather, sir.”

“Thank you for being watchful, Nod, but your main goal is to protect my women from outside threats, not spy on them. They are girls and girls like to talk. You may go now.”

When the guard left Artri sat on a plastochair and sighed. It looked like even most recent employees knew about his obsessions and insecurities. Was it that transparent?

He was sitting for the long time, thinking what to do next. To ignore it, just like he told the boy? Or check what they were talking about. The more Artri was deliberating the more it was tempting. Just to know. In the end the temptation to find if she had told anything positive about him was impossible to ignore. What if she’s already taken but too shy to admit it and had confessed her feelings to the closest friend of hers? In that case he should know earlier to encourage her a little. But if not, well, he can always find the hints what to do to be the master exactly to his sweetie’s liking.

After watching the footage Artri’s excitement evaporated far quicker than it had built itself before. Literally nothing has changed. He was still the enemy, the obstacle. And the girls were talking about the dealing with that obstacle. About neutralising the threat he posed for their well-being. Him who guaranteed them the life of luxury and leisure. Him who had found that Heather girl, knowing exactly she would be to his mistress’s liking. Ungrateful wenches, them both.

Damn Yopal! It would be better to not know. It was so easy to lose all the motivation Artri had.
And what he should do now? To fire Nod?
If the boy has noticed what’s going on, the others may too. And if his men know soon the whole Galdanede will. People aren’t that stupid. Artri cannot afford to show his weakness to the rest of the world. But if it means sacrificing Vien, he’s unable to do this. He’s not that evil they deem Art to be. Unlike his mistress he knows what gratitude means. He will give her one last chance.
When Artri was ready to seek for Vivianne he hasn’t found her in the house. Girls have taken all children to the garden. Wayne was sleeping under the umbrella while Jaye occupied the sandpit, playing with his casts and buckets, both under watchful eyes of their caregivers.

Danny wasn’t asleep. Vivianne kept him on her lap and was playing with him. It was something which involved a lot of clapping and singing. She had the most pleasant voice Artri ever heard. The boy was giggling and shrieking, obviously happy.

This idyllic picture evoked in Artri the bunch of mixed emotions. On one hand, it was great his boys were so well cared for and loved, but on the other it was nearly painful to see how relaxed she looked when with children compared to her relatively stiff and unnatural behaviour when in his presence.

Artri has done almost everything to make her feel good after the unpleasant accident. He had abandoned his work for weeks only to nurse and comfort ungrateful creature. And still meant nothing to the slave.

Regarding circumstances it wouldn’t be a great harm to rearrange her scope of the obligations. It may even be she will end much happier that way. But how would Artri himself survive this? Luckily so far nothing was set. It will all depend on Vivianne’s doings and decisions.

Vien wouldn’t notice Artri’s presence if not for Jaye, who spotted him first.

“Look, mama,” he said, “daddy’s back!” The child ran to Artri throwing his toys to the sand. The physicist lifted Jaye and approached the mistress with the black-haired boy in his arms.

The one Vivianne was holding resembled, to an even greater extent, his father when he was of the same age. Danny’s baby eyes just started to turn green. Wayne looked entirely different and would grow to the man similar to his grandfather.

So far their offspring inherited far more paternal than maternal features. In fact Jaye’s eyes were the only maternal trait that could be easily spotted in any boy’s physique.

Vien looked at them both and smiled, her usual out of duty, reserved smile.

“Hi!” she said. They both agreed to use as few formal titles as possible when with children to show them they’re equal in everything. Danny would not notice yet but Jaye was grown enough to catch it. They will inform him about their existence but later when being able to understand what is their real meaning or rather the lack of it. Another of Vivianne’s early demands from the time they were discussing the details of their future children’s rearing which Artri still honoured. He was determined to do it even if Varian loudly protested against many of their customs, extravagant from his point of view.

“Hi, darlings,” Art smiled back.

Soon Wayne joined his parents and brothers. They stayed together like that until children’s evening meal for which boys were transferred to their aunts. At last Artri could have their young mother only for himself.

Vivianne knew very well there wasn’t any specific rule for returning to penetrative sex after miscarriage. It was all left to master’s liking and goodwill. No entrance ceremony for the woman
who had lost the baby. She should feel happy she’s still breathing and hasn’t lost her appeal to the ruler of her body.

“Undress,” Artri said when the doors to his apartments closed behind them. 
“You cannot parade in so short the dress and leave your master unmoved. I could swear my baby did it on purpose. Am I right?”

“It was warm outside,” she choked out, blushing.

“Playing shy virgin, are we?” Artri laughed. “I admire that amazing ability of yours after three living sons and five pregnancies. Soon in your sixth I hope. Varney assured me you’re fertile again and able to carry. Undress. I was waiting the whole day to make you fully mine again.”

When Vien woke up, it was the morning another day. Artri was standing near the bed with a breakfast tray in his hands.

“My sixth sense told me you will wake up soon, so I have prepared this. Surely it’s time to make up for all the energy lost yesterday.”

He was smiling wildly. Apparently satisfied. It was a great relief. After his somehow awaited and still sudden demand Vien was nothing but terrified she won’t be able to make it, leaving him furious and disappointed. Luckily her master was far more patient than anyone could predict after his first words when they were alone together.

It was still disturbing to be not ready as effortlessly as she used to get before. It had to begin after Jaye’s labourious delivery and the problem seemed to deepen after forced abortion and another birthing. Sex was now not only one of greatest life pleasures but also the forerunner of trying pregnancy and painful and dangerous labour.

Once Artri promised Vien, she will have most elaborate medical techniques in disposal to help her get through procreational duties. Now he was doing almost everything to justify why they need not to be involved at all. It was more than okay for diagnostic reasons but to ease her torment and exertion was always a no-no.

“You know,” he said watching her eating, “you can always say no. I haven’t reminded you about this yesterday but hopefully you were given enough time to withdraw from the affair if you really didn’t want me.”

“I didn’t need to, my lord,” Vien tried to smile. “It was okay!”

“Oh, only okay?” Artri played devastated. “So you must tell me how to improve. We can start tonight. What do you think?”

“Whatsoever you wish, master,” she has chosen one of her standard answers. It was easier that way.
Jaye was inconsolable when they have told him he has to sleep in his own room, not with his parents.
He was so upset Artri promised him the boy can join them in bed in the morning. This placated Jaye a little and at last their son went willingly with Heather, who came to take the child.

It was nice to reclaim his lover from the other persons who needed her just as much. It may be though they will have her for most of the time soon and Artri must take his own now to the greatest extent possible. He was addicted, it’s true, but there are rehabilitation techniques available for every kind of addiction. Even as heavy as Artri’s.

For now he reveled in almost every possibility he was ready to explore. From tender and slow to progressively more wicked and extremely indulging. All of it while watching his lover closely for the slightest hints of discomfort. Luckily he has found none. Hopefully, it wasn’t the mask she was hiding behind and the girl truly enjoyed their closeness.

They had to take the bath after. It couldn’t wait until morning because Jaye could visit them early so the couple needed to be prepared.
When reclining in a bathtub together Artri started his planned inquiry. Being honest he dreaded the outcome, but the physicist was already tired by the fiction their relationship resembled. Because how long the man can live on the hope alone? And how long he will be able to pretend publicly everything is as it should be.
Unless he has the chance…

“You’re talking less and less nowadays,” he said, playing with their tangled hair, her fawn but dark brown when wet and his glossy black. “It was not so in the beginning. I’d love to listen to you more.”

“What do you want me to say, my lord?” Vivianne asked eyeing him suspiciously.

“Oh, whatever you yourself want to tell me. How can I ever dream about knowing how to better serve my lovely mistress if she’s silent all the time when in my presence?”

“I… didn’t want to bore you, sir. I’m only the girl after the secondary school and you Universe famous scientist. There’s not much I could talk about sounding interesting for such a person.”

“Darling baby,” he whispered gathering her even closer, “surely you’re mistaken. I’m always interested in what you feel or think. Always.”

“I thank you my lord, it’s the privilege I don’t deserve,” Vien responded not even looking at him. It didn’t bode well but Art decided a little patience won’t hurt.

“My, my,” he cheated, “you weren’t that meek and ready to an immediate surrender when I met you. Surely you aren’t threatened now or at least not to the extent to seal your tongue completely. Nothing you may tell me will be used against you. You can talk freely.”

Because the only answer from pretty Argossynian was silence Artri tried again.

“Surely you must have your little and not so little problems. Doubts. Insecurities. Questions. Even now I can tell something eats you from the inside. Who else is better suited to help troubled woman than her loving master? Please, darling, tell me and we can think together how to get rid of your problem.”
Waiting for the reply the physicist took one of Vivianne’s hands and kissed one finger after another and then the palm. Even if the water was still warm Vien shivered.

“I’m sorry but you’re mistaken, my lord,” she spoke at last. “You gave me everything I need. Asking for more would be immoral in relation to poor Riadisan women and those who have to live as public property here. I was lucky it was you, who had claimed me. Without your protection I would be dead by now. If… if you want to do something good, please help them. I know you’re mighty enough to make the difference.”

It was clearly a no. Under the cover of utmost humility Argossynian girl was as haughty and proud as ever. She only disguised it better, but the meaning was exactly the same. He will have no part of her soul. The whole of it belonged to her Argossynian family and compatriots and to the inhabitants of women’s and children’s apartments. If so, she will have them and hopefully soon another one in her belly. Such excellent genetic material can’t be wasted.

“Okay,” Artri sighed, “if my baby isn’t in the mood for the conversation I won’t be tormenting her any longer tonight. I guess you’re too tired and sleepy for a serious talk.”

He kissed Vivianne’s temple.

“It’s time to dry up and go to bed. Unfortunately, we have to dress for the sleep because of our most lovely morning guest.”

Holy infinity, he should predict it. The matter was not decided yet though. She still has the time albeit it is shrinking.
The roll call

This time Artri felt it. Four times already his mistress’s organism deceived him hiding its condition. Now the barrier, or whatever it was, had been broken and her deepest secrets were laid before him revealed. The dream of his. To know the woman is pregnant before she will notice it herself.

It was glorious but also sad. Because, when the slave’s body was hiding no secrets before its owner, her mind was firmly shut. Under the pretence of perfect submission she had cut him off completely and definitely and was guarding her splendid isolation with stubbornness Artri never saw in any other female creature. But he has his pride too and knows when to stop. After many efforts to convince her to trust him a little more Artri already knew it was mission impossible.

Now he needed a few weeks more to be sure the pregnancy is firmly set and the embryo’s development proper. If it would be all right Vivianne could be transferred to Perennis to await delivery of his fourth child and Art will be finally free to do whatever he wants and needs. It was not Artri’s choice but he can manage.

“How come it may be endangered?”
Artri wasn’t trying to hide his annoyance. “You’ve said he’s healthy and without the curse. So now what? Are you implying I was deceived before and it was the mistake?”

“It’s nothing of the sort, Mr. Kennert,” Ian answered calmly. “The embryo is sound and properly developed just as I have told you. It’s much worse with your woman’s reproductive organ. It’s not in the best shape. Your children grow big in the womb and it can exacerbate the problems.”

“Is the... danger immediate?” Artri spat, impatiently.

“Not yet, but it may be in later stages of her condition. Especially it’s still early after the twin birthing and subsequent miscarriage. You have promised to discuss the possibility of uterine regeneration before the next pregnancy but left it as it was. You can blame only yourself for neglect that may lead now to disastrous results.”

“Ian, calm down.” It was Varney who spoke. “Mr. Kennert can do whatever he wants with the property of his. It’s not our role to make final decisions.”

“The what? It’s the human being you talking about! She went to great efforts to deliver you healthy and promising offspring. You can’t treat her like a mindless carrier. She’s one of the best mothers I ever met. And even if she wasn’t, nobody deserves to be treated that way. Nobody!”

“Ian, doctor, I mean no harm to my slave,” Artri changed the tone diametrically. “That’s why we are talking. To minimise potential risk but without hysterical moves. Surely you don’t suggest termination because of the problems that may or may not appear?”

“No,” Ian said. “What I’m suggesting is attempting to regenerate the uterus around the embryonal sack. It would improve its condition enough to lower the possibility of serious complications.”

Varney smiled wickedly. “My dear colleague forgot to tell you, Mr Kennert, the attempt like this may cause spontaneous miscarriage.”
“I don’t deny such a possibility,” Ian started but Artri didn’t want to listen.

“But really, you want to endanger my baby now because of something that exists only in theory and may not even happen?”

“It’s not like that!” Ian didn’t want to give up that easily. “I’m sure this pregnancy without previous regeneration will be dangerous for the mother and therefore also for the baby. Complications will appear. I can’t tell now of what kind, I’m not the soothsayer, but there can be many of them, serious problems with placenta or even rupture of uterus among others. I think making it safe for our patient is always worth the risk. Losing the embryo now wouldn’t be that great catastrophe. Being you, Mr Kennert, I would not hesitate.”

“But unfortunately you’re not me,” Artri summed up coldly. “Besides Vien will never agree to do anything potentially harmful for her child. I’m sure of that.”

“So you must explain this to her. Surely she wouldn’t like to orphan her existing children. This one is not the child yet. It’s only the embryo.”

“For Vivianne it’s her baby, doctor. You know how she is. So we won’t be doing anything that may upset our girl. You will monitor her condition and acting accordingly when any health hazards will appear but not earlier. I think we are done for today.”

It was the end of discussion.
Blindfold

“Master?”
Vien was standing before his workplace shuffling her feet. So impatient. Barely a few minutes have passed after she came, summoned to her owner’s cabinet. But Artri can’t forget the Argossynian brat is expecting again. Maybe she wants to sleep or eat or use the toilet or to vomit or whatever pregnant girls need to do this time of the day. Then again Vivianne could use those minutes, she was waiting, to watch her master’s physique. Soon she will be devoid of such a view for longer chunks of time.

“M’sorry, darling,” the physicist got up at last and slowly approached his slave.

“I had to finish what I have started in the meantime. It’s not that I’m purposefully ignoring your sweet person, especially now. Believe me, you’re hard to forget.”

“I would never accuse you of such a thing, my lord,” came out another of her well-exercised answers. Eyes downcast and the head bowed. She was never more haughty than while faking ultimate surrender.

It was so tempting to lift her chin and make the slave look at him. Simple order would result with the same outcome but what would he gain but seeing the same distance and mistrust. Another proof he has chosen the best solution. Poor creature would feel better not being forced to pretend, not being touched by his foul hands, only by her beloved female friends and from time to time the doctors.

“Please sit,” he said, “or lay down on the sofa, just make yourself comfortable. I have some important things to tell you.”

“Thank you, my lord. Will it last long?” she asked taking the seat and positioning herself with back straight and hands on her lap.

“Why, are you in a hurry?” Artri joked delicately, sitting down next to his mistress. It will be the real torture to speak about the things that must be done, surrounded by her unique scent, one of the kind and so so tempting.

“No, not at all,” the pale imitation of a smile has crept on her lips. She looked healthy for the one Ian was so despairing. Hopefully medic’s fears were much exaggerated.

“Okay, so… You know, baby, you are most precious to me. And don’t say you don’t deserve it. Our children are the best proof of your worth but not only them. I’m fully aware I had exploited you far too much during your previous pregnancies. It was very inconsiderate of me. You have passed your exam as the mistress of my household admirably, despite certain sad events, which luckily will never be known to the public opinion.”

Artri stopped for the while to watch Vivianne’s body response to his words. It seemed more relaxed than he expected. Maybe she suspects what he would say and will be happy of it.

“I’d love to see our fourth son healthy and his mother too. So I have decided to spare your person completely from all the representative duties. This should decrease the level of stress I may subject you to. Even if your last miscarriage wasn’t caused by it, avoiding unnecessary stress surely may help you achieve the most desirable result of your condition.”

“I thank you, sweet sir. I’m so happy you care about me. If I could have my say in the matter though I’m not that ill to protect me that fiercely. I can manage for some time at least.”
It was tempting, as much as that heavenly scent and bowed head of hers. Against all odds the sliver of hope grew in Art once more, only to be crashed by Vivianne’s next words.

“But if such is your will master I will comply. Even if my treacherous self isn’t worthy of your amazing indulgence.”

“And I am happy you are ready to cooperate in fulfilling my plans,” Artri said, his voice most possibly sounded not so happy though.
“My will is such, to let my sweetie rest from social life and its murderous demands, you with the children and servants will soon leave for Perennis. Our house is a much better place for the pregnant mother and her young children than the buzzing wasp nest here.”

“Okay, so when we are departing master?” Vivianne raised her perfect brows.

“We? I’m not coming with you.”

“No?” She sounded surprised.

“I was explicit enough, I think. You, children and servants. Female, and male as well to escort you. And to avoid kidnapping my family to Argossyne.” The joke wasn’t very sophisticated, but it had to do.

“You surely overestimate me, my lord,” Vien said, donning her poker face again. Whichever hints of feelings she had shown during their conversation they were gone now.
So it came to this. Artri was sending Vien away. Out of his sight. Once she would be satisfied to be as far away as possible from him, from his toxic, possessive, dominating presence, all the traits she had learnt to abhor in other people. But it was a long time ago, before they had children together. Their fantastic, lovely children who deserved united parents, not estranged individuals who couldn’t find the common ground.

No, it was all bullshit. Children are most important. But it wasn’t for them alone Vivianne felt devastated. She could repeat again and again the man is not worthy her feelings after everything he had done to her, after stinging words and undeserved suffering but it was all in vain.

Artri’s sweet endearments could not hide an obvious fact he was no longer interested in her companionship. The only value Vien still had for the famous scientist was laying in her womb but for this he didn’t need to keep her close. It would be enough to impregnate Vien successfully and leave alone to complete the rest of the work. Alone.

Not literally. She will keep the girls and it was the great consolation in the dire situation, Vivianne had found herself in. But there was a certain amount of things her female companions could not give her. In The XY Zone any woman wanting to matter anything had to posses the firm backup provided by the man. The backup Vivianne has lost. And it may influence the future of them all.

Maybe she had made the mistake letting herself to be overwhelmed by the grief and loathing after the hurt done to her. Maybe she should overlook his faults and tolerate them like many other females, destined to live in this hell were doing, because now, without her master’s protection, Vien would be even more vulnerable and attracting abuse of much worst kind. Once she promised herself to act pragmatically and didn’t keep that promise, letting herself be carried against her better judgement by the unruly feelings.

Now the last thing Vien needed was another woman, clever and determined enough to use the opportunity to ensnare Vivianne’s master and undermine her position. What will become with her sweet boys if such a person will succeed?

But no, Artri won’t let harm his children no matter what. He would rather kill the person being stupid enough attempting to do such a thing. At least they are safe. But Vivianne is not. She isn’t his child but only defiant slave who refused to love her owner. In fact, who refused to admit she loves her owner but they don’t know about that.

And Heather. She will never agree to serve another mistress. Most probably Lea won’t too. She was openly hostile to Francesca and now deeply attached to Vivianne’s children. Vien had betrayed their trust and let down everyone who counted on her ability to protect them. She failed.

If she only knew the begging will work with Artri, she would beg and crawl to ask him for the change of mind. But it was probably what he wanted to see before confirming his decisions. To make it another triumph of his over the stubborn Argossynian girl.

“Mistress, are you crying?” Leandra asked, anxious and frowning.

“No,” Vien answered immediately. “I’m only thinking what else we should take to Perennis.”
“You will let them examine me without your presence, master?” Vien tried to stall the inevitable, asking Artri about the great many details regarding her lonely stay on Galdanedian moon.

“My most trusted guards will act in my stead, don’t worry.”

“I understand, master. And it’s not that I’m worrying. Maybe… maybe I am adult enough to not need the guard while with the doctor.”

“Darling, it’s for safety reasons.”

“Do you really think, my lord, one of them can harm me on purpose?”

“Well, I have many enemies, in theory they could bribe the medics to do just that. Hence double insurance.”

The delicate smirk told her he doesn’t believe what he says but Vien hasn’t got the other choice but to agree.

“I will visit as often as my duties allow so at least sometimes I will be present in person and also if any complications arise. But we have to be optimistic. You’re experienced mother so I believe in you. Anything else my baby wants to know?”

It was probably the last moment to protest against her master’s decision but Vien was too resigned now to even try.
The garden was full of roses in the peak of their bloom, in all colours, a few even blue and black. Jaye was running excitedly through the paths made among them as happy as only an innocent child can be. His black cat Loric seemed to look at the boy disbelievingly. For why must anyone make so much noise without the reason?

Her son loved that animal his father brought him on the first visit after their parting. Her clever boy of three was fast learning many things but most of all he loved counting. He could count anything and it never bored him. He even tried to count the roses but gave up. There were too many.

Unfortunately, there were no children of his age in the vicinity so he had to play hide and seek or a blind man’s buff with Heather and one of the nurses. His brothers were too little and Vien too sick to be of use for their beloved princeling.

It started almost immediately after settling anew in Perennian estate. Since Jaye’s conception doctors were telling her each subsequent pregnancy should be easier because of mixed genetic material she was to receive from the babies growing in her and transforming their mother’s organism to be stronger and more resilient.

Unfortunately, it seemed exactly the opposite. From no morning sickness in first months with Jaye to most of the day sickness. She could neither run too fast, nor change her position too abruptly. Maybe it was a little better than with twins but this supposed to be like that because the baby was single.

Seth Alverin Kennert. Carefully chosen names they both agreed on, they differed from prepared for his lost older brother. Some Makantaran custom as always. For Vien it was no problem and Seth Alverin sounded very nice too.

Vivianne’s favourite names for hypothetical next child were Jade Christine but to fulfill the dream of such a baby she would have to ask Artri for this because it would require artificial insemination with X chromosome bearing reproductive cells. And for the scientist anything remotely close to unnatural was always a no-no.

It was hard not to notice in his case Artri had nothing against stopping the aging process of his own organism around the chosen ingrained age. This was miraculously proper and good. What a wanker!

Now that idea was even further from taking shape because of her own state of semi-disfavour. When Vien inquired if she really is in such state Artri firmly denied. He said Vivianne will be always his most beloved. The man had unique ways of proving the depths of his feelings!

Because of her poor condition for most of the time Vien was reclining on the lounger chair placed for her wherever she wanted to be. From it she could see Jaye playing outdoors but someone else had to watch over his safety. It was usually one of the girls but sometimes the guards also volunteered to help them. And it meant usually Thad.

Vien hoped the boy won’t be harassed for helping Vien too often. After all Artri had left them to their own devices, so he had no right to be jealous. And even such a terrible idiot like him should tell friendship from sexual attraction.

Yes, young guard was in love with the mistress of the house but it was strictly platonic, like he knew from the beginning and accepted the fact Vien is forbidden for him in certain ways. For various reasons Vivianne couldn’t be as close to him as with Heather but after Jon Caroll the boy had been her next favourite adult man.

Perennian exile
Because Vien was feeling unwell for most of the time, it was Lea who took on the responsibilities belonging to the female leader of their small unit and Vivianne gladly let her.

Leandra seemed to be born for the post. She was dedicated and always so well organized, remembering all the details even most boring but necessary for efficient housekeeping and child rearing. She was doing this before but now her role was far more evident. Vien was grateful for her and praised the dutiful servant whenever she had energy enough to do it. She didn’t want her to envy Heather because Vivianne valued them both greatly, albeit for different reasons.

Sometimes though the mistress was feeling too awful to care about anything but surviving another day. Despite this, Vivianne’s blood tests were yielding normal results so the doctors in agreement with her owner, refused pregnant slave any advanced treatment for her ailings. Because its use may influence Artri’s precious baby.

It didn’t matter for him those medicines were tested for tens of years and proved to be safe. Master’s word was the law here and nobody dared to contradict him.

With the man being, as he himself admitted, the sadist on inhibitors it would be more understandable if he was around to watch her torment but for most of the time Artri was absent. When he was to arrive at last Vivianne had been given the patch with the cure to apply during his stay. For Vien’s symptoms not to interfere with her personal slave’s duties. In that special case it was suddenly acceptable.

At last Jaye tired himself with his daily activities and came to his mother for usual cuddles and kisses. In the evenings Vien was feeling slightly better so she could deliver.

After he had enough of motherly hugs the boy suddenly asked.

“Mama, but why is daddy not with us for that long?”

That was exactly the question Vien was dreading. She knew it would appear, eventually. When on Galdanede, even if he was busy, Artri rarely resigned from spending time with his offspring. He was interacting with them as much as he could. No wonder Jaye could miss their daily contacts.

“You see, Froglet,” she said, using old and forbidden endearment, “daddy has the very important work to do. Many people eagerly await its results. But he will come back or summon us to Galdanede as soon as he will finish the next part.”

“And when it will be? How soon, mama?”

“I’m sorry, I don’t know,” Vien admitted sincerely.

“Can’t you talk to the dad and ask him?” Jaye’s blue eyes were filled with hope. She could barely stand that look.

“I’m sorry, baby, but my communicator works only within the borders of our compound, I can’t talk to your father through it.”

“And through aunt Lea’s or Heather’s?”

“Same.”

“And through uncle Thad’s?” Jaye inquired further.

It was possible and Thaddeus would agree for sure but Vivianne didn’t want Artri to think she’s using their son to demand his return to her. It was so frustrating. It was one thing to neglect no longer
desired slave but entirely different to punish by collateral damage their sweet innocent baby. She hated him for this.

“Darling,” she sighed, “we can’t disturb your father just now but I promise I’ll talk to him soon, okay?”

Despite many reservations Vien was ready to sacrifice the rest of her pride if only it meant she will no longer see sadness and longing in her little son’s pleading eyes.
“What is your name, girl?” Artri asked looking at the young woman standing before him. Her escort departed seconds ago, leaving the physicist with his chosen companion, another one-night stand. Once he was using such persons just for release giving them decent pleasure in turn, but rarely asked two times for the same woman.

“Kermia, sir,” answered the girl looking at him resolutely. Artri demanded most insubordinate and clever one and it seemed they had done their best to find what the scientist wanted.

“Where were you born?” Art inquired further.

“It’s a problem, sir. I can’t remember.”

Somehow Artri was not impressed. He ought to feel excitement because of his guest’s laid back approach. To be with someone funny and witty and simultaneously someone whom he owed nothing should be refreshing, enjoyable experience and yet...

The auburn hair, pale complexion and date shaped blue-green eyes. The girl was beautiful. At least he can try.

“And seriously?” he looked at the graceful figure of his interlocutor.

She sighed. “But you know already, my lord.”

“Kermia, don’t call me that,” Artri warned her. “I’m not your lord and least of all master. I forbid these two honorifics. You can even use my first name but not these.”

“Your first name, sir. I see. But not the second?”

“Also not the second,” Art admitted. “How did you know?”

“I was just wondering,” Kermia said with an innocent smile.

She looked promising but Artri was already tired. Like for the first time he felt the burden of his real, metrical age, not ingrained one. The thought alone about having sex with that charming youth made him sick to the core.

It was like with Francesca at the final weeks of Vivianne’s punishment. What that Argossynian witch had done to him? She should be punished again and even more severely for making him miserable like this.

“Are you hungry?” came out the next question.

“Of you, sir? Always!” The girl giggled. She wasn’t afraid of him.

“No, I’m not asking about that kind of hunger. I have changed my mind. I’m too tired for what they have sent you here.”

“Free supper than, with no payment? Sounds tempting!”

What a pity he couldn’t borrow her good mood.

“Yes, exactly like that. We can eat together and then you may go to sleep. I’ll give you the best reference but tell no one we haven’t been together.”

Artri felt enormous relief.
The next day at the party at Kertie’s Artri’s mood didn’t improve in the slightest. He was sitting with the frown on the face and it only deepened as the evening progressed. Art tried to chat with his colleagues and some other Kert’s guests but small talk was boring and serious matters were forbidden to touch. There were public slaves available but he couldn’t find any to his liking enough to use their services in one of adjacent closets. They all tried to woo him and one blond girl worked hard for this but Artri definitely wasn’t interested.

The scientist was close to the decision to leave when Kertie’s mistress approached his temporarily lonely seat.
“Long time no see, Mr Kennert,” she smiled to her master’s researching coordinator.

“Oh, yes.” Artri looked at the woman absentmindedly.

“Hello, Mr Kennert, here’s Galdanedian ground speaking to you!” she laughed. Cheeky. Like only women raised in Double X Zone could be. Local girls were undergoing special training to act bold when such kind of service was demanded of them, like Kermia for example, but Argossynians were undisputable naturals in this area. After all from the earliest age they were taught to be men’s equals and sometimes superiors.

This time Artri’s gaze was far more aware than before and he was ready to notice stunningly beautiful female before him. He was seeing her regularly from time to time but despite widely circulating gossips there was nothing between them so far. Their last longer conversation took place at the memorable costume party at Keith’s which seemed to be years ago. She had not only the beautiful face and glorious hair but was also tall and strongly built with shameless curves here and there. Artri was sure she could be at least one third heavier than his Viv, if not more.

“Now it’s better,” she continued her performance. “I can see you have the problem, sir, and I’m eager to help you. Believe me, I know how. And… is it all because of my certain former compatriot?”

“Why do you think so, May?” Artri’s gaze sharpened a fraction.

“Oh, it’s easy to guess. Really. Your friends and colleagues may be blind but I’m not like them. Remember, I’m from the Double X and know exactly like such a person’s mind works. Being you I would go crazy the long time ago.”

With anyone else Artri would order them to shut up but from May’s lips it sounded too intriguing to stop it. Maybe this is what he needs at the moment. It won’t hurt to wait and see.

With Kertie’s enthusiastic blessing his mistress took Artri not to one of the adjacent rooms but to the inside of the house itself.
“It will be more intimate there,” she said, “and we can talk or do anything else you want without prying eyes and cameras. It’s an open event so my master can’t guarantee full discretion if we would stay in the main hall.”

“How very considerate of you both,” Artri smiled weakly. “But don’t you think our departure together hasn’t been notified already?”

“That’s possible but no one will be sure what will happen next. They can only speculate. As always.”
“And what my beautiful hostess wants to do next?” now his smile looked more like a smirk. It was time to get rid of stupid remorse. It was Vivianne who was bonded to him, not the opposite. He had the right to do whatever he wanted. Unlike with her own doings, even if news about his affair would leak to the wider public, it won’t endanger the future position of their children. Rather opposite because staying faithful to one woman would portray their father as weak and mellow.

Besides, he feels nothing special towards May. She’s just a temporary distraction. Interesting and amusing, yes, but only the distraction. Artri surely deserves something as laid back and unengaging as this.

“First of all,” May had interrupted Artri’s thoughts, “I’d like to free you, my lord, from this unwieldy, gruesome thing. I always found it amusing you, men, like to torture yourself wearing them during all formal occasions.”

After placing his neurowhip on the table May returned to free the physicist from his jacket. But when she touched the shirt Artri stopped her.

“Not so fast, vixen,” he said. “I’m not used to be naked in front of fully clothed partner. Undress yourself first and I will see if it would be worthy to take off the rest of my clothes.”

It proved to be worthy. May knew the way to reawaken his enigmatically weakened libido, and the evening ended with an undisputable success. She was great. Not as good as Vivianne though. Ivvi was hard to match, licentious and innocent at the same time. May was only the former, skilled and self-assured but there wasn’t any mystery in it.

But it was better like that. He had enough of raging emotions for the time being. Besides the attention of the woman, being the property of his colleague, was relatively safe remedy for Artri’s problems until he finds his next true love.

Finding Vivianne took him many years after parting with Vai so how could he hope to repeat this achievement after weeks or even months? His quest may wait the moment Seth will be safely born.
Before the master's arrival

After returning home Artri checked the messages on his communicator. One of them was from Thad. Of course. Luckily Vivianne was too ill to try anything with the brat. Not that the rest of guards would let them. Okay, and what does he want? Artri’s mistress asked for the contact, she has urgent news to discuss with him. Interesting.

Artri immediately sent the message he’s available so the boy could go to Vien if she still wanted to talk. And soon he heard the voice Art could tell from any other. It was infinitely sad.

“Master, I’m so sorry to bother you when you’re busy but Jaye wanted to know when he will see you again. I didn’t know what to tell him so asked Thad to contact you. Hopefully, you’re not angry with me for disturbing?”

Of course it had to be all about their son! Because Vivianne would choke on her own breath before being ready to tell Artri she herself misses him. Yea, why would she need the old and demanding master when can have that young fool, telling her constantly how noble, wise and beautiful she is? But okay, Artri can work with that. It is the useful pretext for visiting them all immediately. He will check and, if available, Art will take her medics with him so will be able to do double business in one go.

“I’m not angry, darling,” he cooed as if talking to Wayne or Danny, not to the adult woman. “Luckily I can spare a little time from now on for our boys not to wait too long for their dad.”

“Now?” The sadness in pregnant slave’s voice evaporated. Was she happy because of Jaye or for herself? With the distance between them Art couldn’t tell for sure.

“That’s fantastic, master. I’ll tell him. Our son will be elated. He loves you so much. Thank you, my lord!”

Now there was unfeigned enthusiasm in what she was saying. So vibrant he could not stop smiling. Only after hanging up Artri realized Vivianne was praising him for what was the part of his fatherly duties, shamefully neglected because of reasons, which had nothing in common with his children’s well-being.

After the short conversation with her owner, Vivianne felt rejuvenated. Having Artri around even for the short time may give her the chance to improve the failing relationship with her children’s father. Because how she can compete with all those healthy and willing women surrounding him on Galdanede if she’s not even there? And when she can’t even talk to him freely. Luckily she was feeling better. Maybe it’s the last occasion to reverse the tide.

“Lea,” she said, her hesitation gone. She was doing this for her children. She must be courageous because of the things far greater and more important than her inconspicuous girly person.

“I want you to wash my hair. We have time to prepare before the master will arrive.”

“Of course, my lady,” Leandra looked fondly at her young mistress. “We will make you the true goddess.”

“I expect nothing as grand as this. Just make me decent looking. It will be enough.” Vien was realistic.

“Oh, but you already are!” Heather approached unnoticed to place the small peck on Vivianne’s
cheek. “Some people just have to realise it.”

Now Vivianne’s hair was even longer than her master’s. It was one thing that improved itself during her tumultuous pregnancy. It was shiny and healthy. The girls took care of her nails, brows and skin. Vien couldn’t use any perfumes but at least she felt refreshed after warm bath.

Pregnant girl was wearing high-waisted, long-sleeved silken dress accentuating the delicate curve of her stomach. Luckily it seemed little Seth may be smaller than his brothers and therefore easier to deal with during birth but it was still early to tell for sure. Vien also had a few rings chosen from the jewelry she got. Her complexion was pale but she could do nothing to improve it because using colorful cosmetics was forbidden for her.

Before the Argo has landed, she was already pacing. It wasn’t good to get nervous but the slave could not help it. When the small spacecraft was there, she took her son by his warm little hand and they went to meet their master and father, respectively.
No New Tale to Tell

Vivianne desperately wanted to talk to her master in private, so the slave’s heart sank when she saw Artri hadn’t arrived alone. Both her doctors were with him.

“Misters,” she curtsied with as much grace as she could manage, not showing her disappointment and confusion. The girl released her son’s hand to let him run toward his father, who picked black-haired boy up and turned around with the child in his arms a few times, provoking the feat of loud shrieks and giggles.

In response to his older sibling’s sheer excitement her youngest babe stirred in Vivianne’s belly, as if wanting to remind his mother she must be strong in the face of her bad luck and uncertain future.

“Welcome,” she said when Artri approached his slave at last, bowing fawn head a fraction before her owner.


“Yes, my… yes, I am,” she admitted. “It’s this time of the day…” Vien wanted to add more but Artri didn’t listen. He was ignoring her purposefully in the presence of their little son. Vien swallowed the tears threatening to fall in the response to such treatment.

Artri had put Jaye on the grass and said to him. “Run to your aunts, darling. We will play later. Only you and me both but now I want your mommy examined. It won’t last long, go!”

“Yes, daddy!” The boy smiled beatifically. He loved running almost as much as counting and so he did exactly that, not waiting a second.

“Come,” Artri urged Vien, following the child with his green eyes until he safely reached the house. “There is not much time to waste. I will have to leave soon.”

“Soon?” Vien raised her gaze toward the black-maned. “You have barely arrived, my lord!”

“Oh,” the man smiled cruelly, “you need not to pretend you desire my presence at your side, my lady. See, I was absent for some time and your condition had visibly improved.”

What could she say as an answer to this insinuation? Only the truth. She can’t beat the manipulator with his own weapon. He’s far too good in it. Truth and sincerity has to be her choice.

“It’s not like that, my lord. And you know this. I want you to stay or take us with you. The family shouldn’t be divided, for the sake of kids alone.” She looked at him with hope.

“Do you think I’m that stupid?” He spat with venom and disgust. “You really suppose me to believe that bullshit?”

So that was it again. Whatever Vien will say will be used against her. It was too much. “Why are you like that, master? What have I done to make you angry?” Her voice was close to begging.

“Oh, you know exactly what you have done,” the scientist answered coldly. “Or what you haven’t. Now come, the doctors are waiting. Their time is expensive, and it happens
I’m paying for it.”

She didn’t like this. She didn’t like this at all. During the very detailed examination Ian and Varney were only whispering something between themselves and Vivianne’s master who assisted them. Nobody wanted to talk to her. It was like she was only the body, pregnant mare or something like that. Even Ian, who was usually more sympathetic to her, seemed to ignore Vien completely. One thing seemed obvious though. Their grave faces left no doubt something was not right. At last they had enough and released Vien. Artri helped her to dress

“You can go now,” he said. “I’ll summon you soon to be instructed what to do next, when we will agree on how to proceed with you in the near future.”

Vivianne didn’t dare to protest but cold treatment she received has frozen her to the core. Young slave left the room full of the darkest forebodings.

“It’s exactly how I predicted!” Now when their most important patient wasn’t with them Ian Vanellan didn’t hide his agitation. “You both have asked for that!”

“The situation isn’t perfect,” Varney said, “but far from critical. Everything may end well yet.”

“May? And if not? You want to do nothing, even now?” Ian looked at the other medic disbeliefingly.

“Not nothing. The bed rest and constant monitoring will do pretty well for the time being. And then we will see. It may migrate higher yet.”

“You know as good as me it won’t migrate because there are bloody adhesions just in the area where it is attached. Most probably after turning of the second twin. We will be lucky if it won’t obscure the cervix, eventually. But even if not it’s dangerous enough as it is.”

Artri Kennert who was silent so far joined discussion.

“And what is it you suggest in the situation like this?”

“The safest for them both would be to end the pregnancy as soon as possible and move the baby to the artificial womb for the rest of their development. You can afford this easily, to avoid unnecessary risk for your partner.”

“My dear colleague let himself be carried too far, I think,” Varney commented. “Such drastic measures aren’t needed at all. It’s still relatively early to tell for sure how the situation will develop. Resting and ceasing sexual contacts will be enough to reduce the risk to an acceptable level. We can always react later or if any alarming symptoms appear. There’s no need to interrupt otherwise successful pregnancy to satisfy Mr. Vanellan’s obsessive-compulsive disorder.”

“How dare you?” Ian snorted. “I have warned you two times already and two times you have taken the risk. The worst never happened, it’s true, but you cannot do it always. It may be one too many and I don’t want to see me being right this time. Our forefathers hadn’t got possibilities we have and oftentimes had no other choice than to accept unavoidable risks. We can eliminate them. Just like that. If you really love the mother of your children, Mr. Kennert, you won’t hesitate to free her from the unnecessary danger. Because it won’t be better. It can only be worse. Varney will tell you only the things you want to hear but I can’t support that folly.”

What happened next was unexpected. Ian was ready for the heated discussion but definitely not for the words he heard.
“Okay,” Artri Kennert looked at him ironically. “Your resignation has been accepted.”
“You can come to us, Ivvi.” Artri summoned Vien through her communicator. At last. She could barely contain the anxiety so stood up too abruptly and the wave of nausea hit her immediately. She had to wait awhile until it subsided and only then could walk.

In the corridor she has met doctor Vanellan.
“Already leaving? I thought you will be present during our conversation!” exclaimed the slave, extremely confused.

“I’m sorry, mistress Vien,” the medic looked at the young woman with something dangerously close to genuine pity.
“I’m not longer desired in your service, my lady. I’m sorry but there’s nothing I can do to help it.”

“Have you resigned?” Vien barely could comprehend what just happened.
“I was fired,” Ian admitted. “Because of my big mouth, apparently. I wish you safe delivery. Must go before your guards will make me.”

“But your transport?” Even now Vien acted as dutiful hostess.
“I’ll take the public one. Don’t worry about me.” That look again. “Good bye, my lady.”
“Good bye, doctor,” Vien struggled to smile until the man left. It had disconcerted her even more.

“Are you coming?” Artri went out to look for her.
“Yes, master,” Vien answered, not mentioning her short meeting with Vanellan.

Vivianne left the room after the few minutes. She was devastated. Bad luck was alive and kicking again.

Vien’s body betrayed her, refusing to cooperate. How can she make Artri more malleable when they cannot even make love together anymore and for Goddess only knows how long?

In the meantime Vivianne’s relentless rivals on Galdanede will have the free rein to do their dirty work of undermining her position even more. For many weeks. Unchallenged. This time mother nature herself was at their side.

This was the final blow after which Vien had no energy left to even cry. It rendered all her calculations void by the blind fate and her own treacherous biology.

That night they spent in different rooms. Artri said he is on a wrong set of meds to risk sleeping with her. But it was only the pretext, she knew.

In the morning, after the mostly sleepless night, Artri came to his slave but only to inform Vien he’s taking Jaye with him to Galdanede for a few days.

“What’s wrong, Squirrel?” He asked seeing her terrified gaze.
“I’m not planning to steal him from you or something. The kid will return safe and sound. A little change of surroundings will do him good. In the meantime, take care of yourself and try to rest as much as possible.”

“I will.” It was everything she could say.
Jaye was very excited to go with Artri alone. Maybe it’s good for him to taste the life without Vien, she thought, just in case.

On the landing pad Vivianne has crouched to embrace her sweet little love. “Don’t worry mama,” Jaye said, “I’ll return soon!” He sounded mature as for his few years.

“I’m sure about that,” she smiled to him comfortingly. No matter what, the child could not see her distressed. “I hope you will have the great time. I’ll take care about Loric when will be on Galdanede.”

Artri came closer to say his farewell too. He only took her by the hand and gave Vien chaste kiss on the cheek. “And I’ll take care of him,” he said.

The minute and they were gone, joining Varney who was already waiting for them in the Argo.
No one could tell Artri’s eldest son was the mama’s boy. Even if in fact he was, but totally in a good way. Wherever they went, to the Centre, the parties his father’s friends or acquaintances were hosting or said friends houses, the boy behaved like he owned the places and people.

Varian once said Artri was the same when being his age. Bossy and self-assured. And infinitely charming.

But Jaye was also sensitive, sweet and caring when liked or loved someone and coldly indifferent when the person wasn’t to his liking. Looking at him Art knew the boy will grow into fiercely loyal friend and partner but also the formidable enemy.

This black-haired child, half Makantaran and a half Argossynian, was everything Artri ever dreamt about when planning his offspring through the long years of loneliness and disappointments. And also far more than he could ever imagine or expect.

Unknowingly Jaye Kennert was the best ambassador of the woman who birthed him. And who sometimes seemed to be more like Jaye’s older sister than mother. So childish herself when acquired for the first time and forced to mature as fast as possible under his rule.

When the scientist was looking into his son’s piercing blue eyes, he sometimes was close to shiver. Because there was that dreadful possibility, when adult Jaye will ever know what Artri had done to his mother, he will kill him without remorse or second thought.

But for now the boy was just innocent and affectionate child of nearly three, demanding constant hugs and kisses, clinging to him in the night or asking for stories before going to sleep.

When Artri could not take care of Jaye personally, because of work or other important business, he was leaving the boy under the tutelage of Nelly and Rissa, where he could play with Murray or even stay with them through the night if need be.

But wherever he was at the moment and whatever was doing, calling his mother at least once a day was a must and Jaye demanded it relentlessly with consequence and determination unheard of in case of such a small child.

Artri sometimes, when Jaye was already done, was exchanging the word or two with his mistress. Vivianne was always telling him nearly the same. She’s feeling relatively well. She rests a lot. Calderstone is visiting her regularly. Artri knew she’s not entirely honest with the first statement. His guards reported him she was often dizzy, unnaturally tired, unable to sleep or sleeping too much. Apparently the girl wasn’t able to trust him enough to share the news about her real state of being. Vien never told Artri she misses him. Never asked when he plans to visit her.

It was true Jaye, being of best modified kind, was developing extraordinarily fast and his skills and experience were growing almost exponentially with each passing day. It was thrilling but also slightly terrifying. Because soon he can ask certain inevitable questions and Artri wasn’t entirely
ready to answer them all. In fact, the boy did it once already. Now everything was quiet and still but it’s only the matter of time.

After a few days spent together Artri thought more and more often about the reconciliation with the girl without whom this miracle of the child would never happened to his family. Maybe he should try once more, for his boys if not for himself. If only she wasn’t that difficult and stubborn.

It was the party organised by him. An event without the hostess. Anabelle offered to act in her stead but Artri declined. His guests may take care about themselves. He was doing them favour enough opening Cycads Valley for the crowd.

As a master of the pregnant slave, even if she was temporarily far away from Galdanede, Art was not obliged to wear the neurowhip. Because of it in the invitations the physicist sent he demanded from the others to appear without the weapons too. After all his little son and his slightly older colleague would be present and what if by bad luck one of boys will touch the head of someone’s neuro? It was out of question. Artri couldn’t risk that.

Despite the guards, watching over Jaye’s safety all the time, Artri himself was checking on his baby regularly. Maybe it was unreasonable and overprotective behaviour but he didn’t mind. Therefore, the boy always had the chip hidden in his clothes for his father to localise him and listen to what people say to the child.

People slowly gathered and Artri was welcoming them. It wasn’t privilege everyone was granted with, only most important guests could expect to shake hands with most famous contemporary scientist.

In the meantime Jaye was sitting in the corner with the colouring book, waiting for Murry. The other boy and parents were on their way. With the corner of his eye the physicist spotted May Tuner approaching the table. She arrived earlier together with her owner. Without a second thought Artri activated the earphone.

“My, my,” she said, “what a pretty boy you are!” That wasn’t very intelligent introduction, Artri thought, surely she could do better. Maybe Kertie’s slave was one of those persons who lose their wit when confronted with little children. He was listening intently but Jaye said nothing. It was so like him. Because what could he say in reply to such clumsy compliment? But no. The boy was only thinking.

“Being pretty doesn’t really matter,” the child stated with firm conviction. “That’s what mama says.”

“Not always, but it sometimes helps. Don’t you think?” May was determined to continue.

“And how do you know, miss?” There was self content grin on Jaye’s little face visible even from the distance. “You’re not pretty!”

Artri could not believe it. His son couldn’t know. It’s impossible anybody would tell him May is his father’s lover, okay, maybe not exactly that, current bed partner. Nobody would dare. And yet.

May should know better than to try again but the woman could not acknowledge defeat. She sighed with exaggeration. “I guess my humble self is not to my prince liking. But maybe he prefers fruit candies instead. It happens I have a few. Do you want some?”

Art was listening with bated breath ready to intervene.

“Mama says I can’t eat anything from strangers,” Jaye said and returned to his colouring book, not paying attention to the woman anymore. Like she wasn’t there.
Wren

Chapter Summary

Another angsty chapter. I'm sorry.

“Dear child, you have to ask your master to give me official carte blanche. It’s for your safety, yours and baby.”

It was most probably the fourth time doctor Calderstone was harassing Vivianne for the same thing. What she could tell him? That her master abandoned her? That she hasn’t got a direct line to him for many weeks? That she would have to beg him for mercy in the presence of her guards, who alone of all the household could talk to Kennert freely. If this wasn’t disfavour than what it was?

When Jaye was with Artri on Galdanede at least she could talk to her owner from time to time. Now it has ended.

“Can’t you ask him yourself, doctor?” She raised her head at last. “You’re a professional. My lord should listen to your reasoning. Surely he wants no harm be done to this baby.”

“Don’t you think, my lady, I haven’t try?” Wren sighed. “But he always says we have time and until you rest and there’s no excessive spotting, we can wait. Varney has told him vaginal birth is still possible. Maybe it is but the situation may change anytime and if immediate surgery would be necessary, we should keep official permission in the pocket so to speak. Because there will be no time to look for it during an emergency. Hopefully, it will never come to this but we must be prepared.”

“I know this, mister,” Vien whispered. “But if… if he doesn’t care about your warnings there’s no way he would listen to silly Argossynian girl, oversensitive and exaggerating.”

Wren came closer and embraced her in a fatherly, gentle manner. She should back off immediately and tell the doctor to stop but was temporarily unable to do anything to break the contact with another human being. She was so tired of her fears and weakness, of abandonment and constant waiting, of pretending in front of her maidens and children that nothing wrong happened.

“We shouldn’t do this, doctor,” she said at last. “Someone may blackmail us for illegal activities.”

“Oh,” the medic barely contained his sudden amusement. “Is this how comforting our friends and patients is now called? And who can blackmail us? Surely not that sympathetic young man who escorted you and left us to have some privacy. I can see he’s caring about you far more than any even most dutiful servant might for his mistress. Maybe he can travel to your master to remind him personally his duties are waiting. I cannot go myself because I can’t leave you without help in an uncertain situation.”

“I’m sorry. I can’t send Thad with the errand like this. It’s out of question.” Vien shook her head. “Guards are forbidden to leave Perennis. Only my master can free them or change their post.”

“Oh, so we are stuck,” summed up the medic.

“So it seems,” Vivianne sighed again. “There’s nothing left for us but waiting.”
Wren returned home with a heavy heart. Terrible impotence he experienced was killing him. He should give it to Kennert straight how terrible and neglectful master the man is. The problem was he could not afford to antagonize the scientist. Not because of his own career but because both Ian Vanellan and Percy Salter were begging him not to provoke stupid dominant. Because if Wren would be fired too, poor Kennert’s girl will remain solely on mercy of that idiot Varney Wehnes who would rather let her die than say or do anything not to that terrible man liking.

Unfortunately Vivianne was right. He could only wait, monitoring situation and hoping Kennert will return before it won’t be too late.
“Is that old bore tormenting you again?” May asked when they were eating the late supper. She always had a great appetite after having sex. Therefore, in fact she was eating and Artri was just accompanying her at the table drinking his favourite Makantaran wine.

“Being you I wouldn’t call Dr Calderstone old. He’s much younger than me.” The physicist smirked.

“Ah, really,” May hasn’t been moved by his statement at all. “Then he sounds like two times older than you,” May shrugged.

“You should tell him not to disturb you unless something very important happens. Surely you lose too much time through his constant exaggerating. Some people just want to be perceived as more important than they really are.“

Artri looked at the woman ironically.

“I can’t remember I ever gave you the job of my time manager.”

“You can’t blame me for trying. Someone has to take care of you.” May seemed to be totally convinced she’s right.

“You better take care of your owner. I don’t need it,” he spat, close to irritated.

“You do. Every man needs female warmth and adoration.”

May was fantastic in bed but her insurmountable desire to become an essential part of Art’s life also outside of it was becoming more and more annoying.

Artri found Kert’s woman physically attractive, at least enough to use May regularly for his pleasure, but from the beginning wasn’t a great fan of her character. She was far too scheming and calculated for his liking.

It seemed Kertie preferred exactly these qualities, and it was possible he was using his witty and beautiful slave to gain more of his coordinator’s good graces and to advance at last to the circle of his closest friends and advisers.

They were both indisputably ambitious but also naïve. Artri would never mix the matter of carnal pleasures with his professional life. Besides May, however useful for the scientist, regarding circumstances, wasn’t exactly his type in any aspect of her person.

What he really liked was slightly girlish and vulnerable, noble and selfless. It was exactly what was hidden in his Perennian compound and was waiting for him all that time. Maybe he should check on his sweetie and her children at last.

Vivianne may not love him but still belonged to the man, and forever will. Presented and bonded, with his initials engraved on her skin and his fourth son big now in her belly.

The amount of things the physicist had done so far to bind that amazing creature to him spoke volumes about his insecurities in the relationship in which he was meant to be by definition the dominating force. He should hate her for making the utter fool out of him but by some miracle still couldn’t.

Pity Vien wasn’t available now in some important aspects of her service but it cannot be helped until the time comes for the slave’s next entrance ceremony. Now Artri knew he had made a huge mistake not paying attention enough to Vanellan’s proposition to regenerate throughly her womb. If he was more malleable when the time was right abstaining from his favourite activities wouldn’t be now
necessary.
It was too late to cry over it. Soon there will be another chance.

Yes, he definitely should visit her and sort things out when the occasion presents itself.

“What are you thinking about, my lord?” May apparently noticed the scientist’s absent gaze.

“I have asked you to not call me that,” Artri reminded her calmly. “Surely Curtis might be offended hearing you, honouring another man with the title that should belong solely to him.”

“I assure you, Mr Kennert, my master isn’t petty in the slightest. He wouldn’t mind at all.” May laughed. It probably was meant to sound carefree but there was an undeniable strain in her voice and laid back demeanour.

“Are you done perhaps?” Artri asked. “Because, you know, I’m getting sleepy and would prefer to send you back to your master.”

One look at the woman and Artri knew she didn’t like it but was in no position to disagree. It was surprisingly satisfying to see her like that.

“So?” he urged her to react.

“If you wish me to I’m ready,” answered May, even if she apparently would prefer to say an entirely different thing.
He couldn’t appear like that. Without a slightest warning. Being absent for weeks and now materialising out of a thin air in that elegant Argo of his. Their lord and master was here and in the worst time possible.

“Why is my mistress not welcoming me?” It had to be his first question.

“I’m sorry, Mr Kennert,” Heather was literally trembling when talking to the dominant male of their household. The way he was measuring her with his green stare was making the girl nervous. It would be better if the children were not sleeping. He could go to them and they would have a time to prepare for the inevitable. Even if she was mortally afraid of him Heather volunteered to welcome the master of the house. Because someone had to.

“Is she that unwell?” He inquired, before Heather had the chance to say more.

“Mistress went to bed earlier. She didn’t know you’ll be arriving today, sir. The doctors advised her to rest as much as she can.”

“I know what doctors say,” Kennert interrupted Heather’s speech again, “but is it too much to make a few steps to meet her master?”

He didn’t know yet what happened but was already angry. Heather couldn’t help it. She had to say what was to be said lest the male will find by himself. It doomed them either way.

“She could not meet you, sir, I’m afraid. Our lady had a minor accident today. Nothing serious, really, or influencing the baby. We summoned the doctor, I mean Mr Calderstone but because of more important issues he will visit the mistress in the morning.”

Miraculously Mr Kennert didn’t lash or shout at her. “What kind of accident?” He asked quietly instead.

“She stepped badly and sprained her ankle…”

“And where is she?”

“In the bedroom, sir.”

“Okay,” the master was much calmer than in the beginning. But it meant literally nothing. He could change from good to worse in a split second. “I’ll see how my slave fares,” he was graceful enough to inform her.

The girl released the breath she was holding. It was far from done. Maybe Vien will placate him and nothing wrong will happen but she didn’t believe that.

Vien didn’t have much time to plan anything more elaborate to save the situation. It was her fault. She should be more careful. What so terrible has Vien done again to deserve such monstrous bad luck? Why he had to arrive just today? Tomorrow morning Wren would come to fix it and nobody would know about the accident.

She ordered that one girl should meet the menace and direct him to Vivianne’s bedroom.
And so he was there. The silhouette she both longed and dreaded to see again. Her heart was beating wildly and mother’s anxiety has induced her child’s activity. Seth usually was calming down in the evening but now was kicking with renewed vigour. It was a consolation of sorts. The reminder that Vivianne can’t be alone when their baby is with her.

She let him speak first.
“Hello darling. Heather told me you had an accident. The minor one. Is it true?”

“Yes, master. I have stepped most unfortunately and had twisted my ankle. I’m becoming clumsier and clumsier nowadays.”

Pregnant slave tried to sound laid back and calm. It was an ordinary thing, right? Such things can happen. It shouldn’t be the big deal. It shouldn’t.

“Poor sweetie,” he smiled. “Can I see it?”

Vien smiled back. “If you wish, master.” If she would show him everything is all right, maybe there will be no consequences.

Artri lifted the duvet slightly to look at Vivianne’s injured leg. It was swollen, but not too much, under the cold compress Lea made.

“Does it hurt?” the man asked looking at Vien with something reminding genuine concern.

“Not that much. I can manage.” She smiled again this time hopefully in the more convincing manner.

“And nothing else but your ankle suffered, am I right?”

“Yes, totally. There was the table I could grab, and it prevented me from hurting myself more.”

“I’m glad it ended that way,” Artri said covering her feet. “But you should tell your guards to inform me about your injury. If I knew I could take Wehnes with me to fix it immediately.”

“I didn’t want to disturb you because of such triviality,” Vien lied but Artri seemingly didn’t notice.

“If you say it can wait till tomorrow, I won’t be keeping you from the much-needed sleep any longer,” Artri said eventually.

“Good night to you both.”

“Good night, my lord!” Vien was watching her master go. She could barely believe it all went that smooth and with no crazy accusations.

But even in the darkness and silence of her bedroom Vivianne could not relax. Who knows what he’s now doing. Wasn’t the man suspiciously too calm? She should ask about the possible consequences for which her servants may suffer. That was cowardly of her, not to touch the subject at all. Vien had to be sure. She has donned her dressing gown and not bothering with looking for shoes limped toward her servants’ rooms.
The Mistress

Chapter Notes

Hi to everyone reading it. When I have started with the first part of the story I have described it as tiny part of my domination fantasies. Now somehow its more than 188K words long (which is longer than the first part of the Lord of the Rings which has about 177K) and counting. Due to the excess of chapters in the fourth installment I have decided to add one more part in which Vivianne's adventures after the birth of Seth will be described. It will be called “Mother of Hope. The Awakening.” In this part there are only a few chapters left and we will soon return to the present (and great unknown).

It was almost exactly how Heather feared it may end. Mr Kennert returned to them after finishing with the mistress. She could only hope he didn’t harass Vien too much for what happened. Knowing their cruel master he could accuse their poor lady of the attempt to induce miscarriage or something equally crazy.

No man in his right mind would like to hurt sick woman and pregnant with their child but Heather was no longer sure Mr Kennert is of right mind anymore. He behaved like lunatic sometimes, incurable and dangerous because of all the power he was holding.

First, he ordered all Vivianne’s women to gather in one room and then summoned his guardsmen. Not all, only his most hard core personnel. He sent one man to watch sleeping children in case some of them would wake up and the rest was left to await further commands.

“Do you know why we are here now?” The dominant asked staring at them. All other girls nodded, unable to speak. But Heather could not stay silent. She could take the whipping or even worse torture but she had to know.

“Sir, forgive me but is my mistress all right?”

The servant was close to fainting when the scientist’s cold gaze reached her person, looking at Heather like she was an annoying insect. Heather was sure the arrogant male will not grant her with the answer but reality defied her expectations.

“Ivvi is all right,” his tone was almost soft when talking about the mistress. “You don’t expect me to punish the woman with child. My child. Or do you?”

He knew what she was thinking! The girl felt the sudden shiver.

“Returning to the matter at hand,” the physicist resumed his speech, “you are guilty of serious negligence of your duties toward the most important person in this house. One of you should be close to thy mistress and be ready to secure her steps. Ivvi admitted she had to catch the table to avoid the fall. It means she had no one beside her at the moment. That’s inexcusable. What if she would fall on her belly? Do you comprehend that? For your lack of proper attention you will be all disciplined now. One after another, in the cellar. I will administer the punishment personally.”

One guard stepped forth and handed to Mr Kennert the black neurowhip of his.

“Well,” he said, playing with the monstrous thing with his long gloved fingers. “Who volunteers as
the first? Maybe you, sweet little Heather? You were very vocal today. We will see how you will answer when the head of my toy touches you, hm?"

Heather wanted to say she’s ready but before she could speak, after the sign given them by their boss, two guardsmen caught her by the arms. They apparently intended to drag her out toward the staircase to the basement.

The other women were watching the spectacle in the stunned silence. So far none of them was treated that way.

They could make two or three steps toward their target when something unforeseen took place. Their lady appeared among them. Panting out of the exertion, barefoot and limping heavily. Despite her visible weakness she didn’t look submissive in the slightest. The mistress was angry.

“Leave my maidens alone!” she spat. “They are not guilty!”
Not So Fast

Vien didn’t know how much anger has gathered inside her until she saw her gentle and always caring friend, being taken by the men, armed to their teeth and each the head taller than she.

The girl didn’t mind her own fate; she was probably doomed already but could not let this happen. Vien would rather die on spot than agree to such monstrous injustice.

“Leave my maidens alone! They are not guilty!” Vivianne shouted with as much conviction as she could manage. Oh, how she craved in that moment to be that commanding and self-assured as Christine always was.

Her desperate attempt to put an end to their foul action was completely ignored. They were dragging Heather further, despite girl’s own attempts to break free from their iron grip. This could be expected but infuriated pregnant slave even more.

“Stop it, stop it at once!” Vien cried in desperation ready to throw herself on them.

She didn’t do it though because in that exact moment another voice repeated her words. “Stop it!” It was Kennert. “Yes, you boys. Can’t you hear what your mistress commands?”

Vien didn’t notice her master’s presence so far, concentrating unreservedly on the dire scene before her. But of course he was there, it had to be his direct order to punish her maid. She knew he was jealous because of their closeness and now had the perfect pretext for beating poor girl, or worse.

It didn’t matter now. The only thing that did was peace and safety for Heather. Vien herself endangered the girl and the rest of her maidservants because of her carelessness and lack of caution.

“She’s innocent,” Vien groaned. “I have sent them all away. I am guilty. Punish me instead.” If need be, she was ready to kneel before the man.

“Nobody will punish you, my silly girl,” he said. Seconds after his soft and warm embrace surrounded Vien.

“Let the maid be,” he urged the guards to free Heather. “I annul the punishment on our mistress’s demand. We can’t refuse to grant the wish of the pregnant woman. You can go now.”

Kennert’s employees, stunned and surprised by an unexpected turn of events, stepped back at once.

Heather was standing still unsure what to do.

“You can join the rest,” Artri said to her, lifting Vien from the floor. “You’re forgiven. Next time be more careful.”

He waited until men left before taking his slave back in the direction of the bedroom she had left in such anxiety and turmoil.

“What was it?” He chided her delicately. “Running like crazy with that big belly of yours. Your friends would eat me alive if something bad happened to you.”

“I have to,” she groaned again being placed on the bed which haven’t got the time to cool much in her absence.

“Of course you didn’t,” Artri sighed. “It wasn’t worthy the risk you have taken. I wouldn’t murder them or anything like that. It wast mostly for the show. A few minor lashes for each to make them
more careful."

“None of them deserves even that!”

“Okay, okay. I get it. They are yours to command. I won’t touch them any more unless asked. Happy?”

“Yes, master. Thank you,” she sobbed. Now when it was over, she could be weak again.
Leaving

Wren Calderstone visited them in the morning as promised.

“Mr Kennert, I didn’t expect you here,” the doctor said, painfully stiff and official. “But it’s good I could meet you in person at last. We have urgent matters to discuss.”

“One urgent business is waiting already,” Artri said pointing toward his slave, dressed for the day and sitting in the armchair. Art wanted her to stay in bed but she demanded to change before the medic arrives.

“What was so important for my baby to wait for help that long?”

“Your mistress assured me she didn’t need immediate intervention.”

“So you won’t tell me? Okay. Doctor’s confidentiality, I guess.”

“Exactly, Mr Kennert. May I take care of my duties now?”

When the doctor was examining and dressing Vivianne’s injury Artri received an important message from his deputy. Coordinator’s presence was needed in the Centre. Immediately. Urgently. Now. Tommy was insistent he can’t say more through the communicator. The news was strictly confidential.

Artri sighed. His conversation with Calderstone had to wait. He knew what the main issue would be. Wren was insistent. The doctor wasn’t happy when the physicist explained the circumstances demanding him to leave soon.

“I’ll send you the documents you need from Galdanede,” he promised. “Most probably this evening, after I will be done with whatever Fisher wants me to. Tomorrow at the latest.”

“Okay, if you say so. If I won’t get it, I’ll be reminding you,” Wren said, looking at Artri with barely veiled disdain. And then he was gone.

Now it was time to say goodbye to Vivianne but before the scientist had the chance to reach his mistress, the girl herself appeared in his cabinet. She wasn’t limping anymore.

“Mr Calderstone told me you’re leaving soon for Galdanede, master.” Vivianne’s voice was hoarse like after crying, even if there were no other signs of it. Interesting.

“I wanted to ask if it’s really necessary.”

It was the last thing Artri could expect from always cold and proper Argossynian even after her yesterday’s outburst.

“I mean for you to leave us in such a moment.”

“What a moment, darling?” Artri asked with a bit of concern.

“I’m near my confinement, my lord. I wish you could stay with me until the labour.”

“There are more than a few days left, I’ll be back when it’ll happen, don’t worry.”

“I thank you my lord for this but I’m nearly sure it won’t last that long. My gut feelings is telling me it may be the matter of hours. It’s the way Sethie is squirming inside me, he’s constantly stretching his little body like he wants out. It was the same with all his brothers.”
“Well, if you’re right, you or my staff may always summon me. I’ll be back in no time. And now I really must hurry.”

“Master, I’m afraid. Please don’t go.”

That was something new. “Ivvi, stop that nonsense. You’re behaving like it was your first. I know you don’t feel well, but it seems it’s typical for you when pregnant. You should be used to it already. I will return if when I’ll be free from my duties but no earlier.”

“Nathoo, I’m afraid. Stay with me, please!”
She apparently wanted to kneel in front of him but the guard whom he summoned discreetly while talking to the slave appeared at last.

“Grant, please take your mistress back to her apartments. She’s not feeling particularly well so you must make certain she will reach them safely. Unfortunately, I must go now so cannot take care of it myself. I’ll be in contact all the time in case something happens.”

“Yes, boss. Come, mistress, I’ll help you.”
His employee was a professional, no doubt about that. Vien didn’t dare to protest further in the presence of the male servant.
“Goodbye, my lord,” she whispered, defeated.
Thinking

Chapter Summary

Artri being an idiot. Dangerous idiot.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Flying back to Galdanede, much earlier than he expected, Artri Kennert was thinking about last events. So much happened in so short the time. But it was glorious to be so close to Vien

Flying back to Galdanede, much earlier than he expected, Artri Kennert was thinking about last events. So much happened in so short the time. But it was glorious to be so close to Vien again. First to see her in full glory when she was defending her mousy little friend. Half naked, heavily pregnant and injured and yet ready to attack, like vicious weasel throwing herself on the much larger prey.

Artri wondered what his idiots of the guards would do if he wasn’t there to intervene. Their most sacred duty was, above all else, to protect the mistress and her babies. Would they know what to do to calm Vien, not hurting the girl or her precious burden in the process? It was disputable. Maybe he should re-test all the members of his male staff to be sure of their usefulness in more demanding circumstances.

Vivianne impressed him enormously. She was such a great warrior, every inch true Valkyrie. Because it’s easy to be brave when you’re armed and strong and have every advantage over your enemy. She was nothing of the sort and yet didn’t hesitate to act. And won.

But when it was past danger, she was again her sweet and soft submissive self, ready to dissolve in hot tears and sighs.

And today she used his name after so long the time, Artri can barely remember the similar case. For the first time, since Goddess knows when, Vien asked him to be with her. Asked him to stay, out of her own will.

Either she realised that pushing him away may only make her situation worse and in her vital interest is to keep him closer than before or she was genuinely afraid, just like she told him. Whatever the reason Vivianne wanted him again.

Most probably their long separation, and uncertainty caused by it, has mellowed proud Argossynian enough to seek for the support and compromise, the refuge from her troubles.

What a pity Artri couldn’t stay to explore that wondrous possibility at once but maybe it will be for the better. To mellow her even more, to be ready to give herself whole at last, when the time comes.

Only a few days before Artri would deem such hopes unfounded and virtually impossible but now they were within his reach or so it seemed…

When his Argo docked on the landing pad, the physicist had made the decision. After tending to Tommy’s important business he will go to May. It’s high time to tell the wench their arrangement had outlived its usefulness for her temporary lover and must be terminated before Artri’s girl will go
into labour.

Despite Vanellan’s and then Calderstone’s incessant moaning Vivianne’s pregnancy was developing more or less properly. None of their catastrophic scenarios came into being so far. And hopefully they won’t. Most probably the medics just wanted to be on the safe side, in case anything happens. Kertie’s slave had to be right. It was plain exaggeration, changing fly into an elephant.

Artri will send any docs Wren wants but there’s no terrible hurry. When Artri met Tommy and heard the news his golden-haired friend brought, he nearly forgot what was left at home. But his communicator was in standby mode all the time, in case Art would be summoned back to Perennis. Until the evening the signal didn’t come. Vien had to misinterpret her symptoms. They yet have to wait for the birth of his fourth child.

Chapter End Notes

Only two or three chapters left in this part. Constructive criticism is always welcomed.
Cheating

When Artri came May has taken his jacket and placed it on the chair. “Kertie says you are a winner,” she said.
“And now our venerable coordinator of most successful researching team wandered to my humble self to celebrate. Am I right, sir?”

Artri smiled to her. “You are anything but humble, May. Have I told you this already?”

“Perhaps once. So, how was your day, mister?” The woman asked unabashed.

“Hectic, incredibly hectic” Artri admitted yawning in not very discreet manner.

“Tired,” she noticed coming closer. “I have a perfect remedy for this condition, sir. The big warm bed my master lent us for immediate use. What do you think?”

“Actually, I came to…“ He started but stopped without finishing the sentence. Because why not? Artri can jump the occasion. It won’t hurt to use it one more time before he will become the dutiful pater familias. Because Vien won’t be available for a long yet.

Coordinator let himself be led to his lover’s bedroom. Too exhausted to be more active he agreed for the woman to pleasure him with little input of his own.

“My sweet pillow prince,” May giggled. “Was my action to your liking, sir? Or is your multipara better than me?” She asked provocatively.

“She’s better than anyone,” Artri said dreamily. “You have no idea!”

“And yet you came to me,” she cheated placing her warm arm on the scientist’s breast.

“You know it’s because of the doctors.”

“Ah, doctors, doctors. Every shrewd girl knows how to bypass their stupid orders. Unless she doesn’t care.”

“No, no, she does,” Artri said, not sure why it seems to him entirely right. He did not understand how he knows it but he did. It was there all the time. Only he didn’t notice. He was so stupid. But won’t be. Not anymore.

Artri yawned again.

“I have to go soon,” he said, “but will take a little nap before. Just a small one. Wake me up if I will sleep for more than an hour.”

“Of course, sir. As you wish, sir,” May’s wide smile had something predatory in it but the physicist didn’t mind. He was exhausted. Short nap will do him good.

When Artri’s communicator vibrated in his jacket in another room, there was nobody, who could check what’s going on. After some time Kert’s slave came and turned it off, not looking at the annoying thing. Her valuable guest wasn’t to be disturbed in his much needed sleep. Then she returned to their soft bed.
Despite Vivianne’s forebodings nothing happened that day. Late in the evening Sethie mostly stopped his squirming and stretching, letting her sleep in relative comfort.
On one hand it was good, because Vien was not ready yet to confront the challenges of the next labour, on the other though it could give Artri another pretext to accuse her of the attempt to befool him. She couldn’t help the latter so thinking of it too much was pointless.

Vien needed rest, weakened still after yesterday’s commotion and today’s futile undertaking to stop her master’s departure. Regardless of her fears and troubles the sleep came to the pregnant girl almost at once.

She was dreaming of the unknown planet with greenish skies. There was abandoned quarry there, with a turquoise lake in the middle. On the small rocky island surrounded by its clear waters Vien saw Christine and her partner. Both women were waiving to Vivianne and calling her from afar. She hadn’t any boat or anything suitable to reach them, but to see their beloved faces alone was such great joy, she barely could breathe.

“It’s wonderful you are here!” Vivianne shouted, loud enough for them to hear. “I’ll show you my youngest baby. But first I must give birth. Just wait here and I’ll call the physician to take him out of me!”

“Mistress Vien! Mistress Vien!” Someone was shaking her awake. Vivianne was furious after Christine and Rhea disappeared leaving her all alone in the unknown, and unpleasantly wet, bed.

When Vien opened her eyes in the dimmed light, she saw Heather who was sleeping with her, like almost always when Artri was absent.

“You were crying in your sleep, mistress,” the servant said looking at her with worry.

“You had the nightmare!”

“The nightmare is here,” Vivianne said lifting the duvet. She was afraid to see blood but the wetness surrounding her luckily wasn’t red but it wasn’t a good sign too. It would be harder to go on dry.

“Go to the guards, Heather,” she said. “Tell them to summon Wren and my master with the other doctor. I am to give birth that night.”

“My waters broke prematurely,” Vien informed the doctor. “But the contractions are progressing like by the book. Thad tries to contact my master, but he’s temporarily out of reach.”

She tried to sound calm even if anxiety was tearing her guts, together with labour pains. In fact Thaddeus made many calls to Kennert so far but the scientist wasn’t responding. Hopefully, he won’t be needed in birthing chamber

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The girls were holding her by the arms from both sides while the doctor was looking after the
crowning of a baby’s head. It looked as if Kennert’s son will be born before Artri returns home.

“I don’t want to be harsh to you, but you’re trying unwittingly to postpone the moment of final solution,” the medic noticed.

“Your master apparently is still busy and you have your own task to do. Think of the child, not the male. Prolonging childbirth can endanger you and your baby.”

“Am I?” Vien frowned. “I didn’t mean to do this.”

“If so, I want you to prove it. It’s almost done. A bit of effort and you both will be safe. And everyone around happy. Please, darling, let us be happy soon.”

How could she refuse the good man, who was asking her that nicely? She had doubled her efforts.

So far everything was going relatively smooth. Local neonatologist was waiting to examine the baby and help in final stages of delivery.

The boy was indisputably lively and, unlike his older brothers, incredibly vocal. Vien didn’t know why they didn’t let her enjoy his hard won presence longer but was too exhausted to argue. She followed him with her eyes so could not notice Wren’s grave face.

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“Am I dying?” Vien asked.

“Of course not!” Wren’s smile didn’t look convincing.

“The blood synthesizer is working all the time but it will last until lost fluids would be fully replaced. You may perceive passing coldness or even temporary loss of consciousness. But I’ve got you and won’t let you leave that easy.”

It was like the doctor said. Sometimes she had violent shivers and her field of vision blackened more and more often. Wren was doing something with lower part of her body but she didn’t see what. Calderstone has administered full anaesthesia there. He hadn’t her master’s permission for using pain control of any kind but apparently didn’t mind.

“Natti?” she groaned seeing someone entering the room. But it was only Heather, her face wet from tears. So he didn’t come. He didn’t even want to look. Yet another broken promise of his. It was Vivianne’s last conscious thought.
“What do you want for breakfast?” May asked Art as soon as he opened his eyes.

“For breakfast?” The man sat abruptly on the bed. “You were to wake me after an hour. It’s the morning already!”

She laughed. Undeterred as always. “Indisputably it is.”
“I was pitying you, mister. You were so exhausted. It would be the greatest sin to…”

Artri stopped listening. He grabbed his clothes to dress messily in an incredible hurry. At first the scientist couldn’t localise his communicator. He needed a bit of thinking to remind himself of the jacket left in an adjacent room.

Perfect! Just perfect! As the master of pregnant slave he shouldn’t part with the damned thing for longer than a few minutes. More, he should carry ingrained chip all the time to avoid the situations exactly like these.

“Oh, okay,” Artri told himself to calm down. Maybe nothing important didn’t happen yet. It was high time to check.

Strange thing really. The communicator was off. Artri didn’t remember shutting it down. Mumbling something unintelligible he turned it on and groaned loudly. The thing was overflowing with unanswered messages in both text and vocal form.
Some were from Thad, some from Wren.

In the last one Thad sounded like through barely kept tears.
“She suffers massive hemorrhage, sir. Doctor has the problem to overcome it. If you want to see her alive, please come.”

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