Poker Night

thetropican & Roy Ellison



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by thetropican and Roy Ellison

Smashwords Edition

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The limousine's tires crunched on the gravel in the foggy night. The driver shut off the headlights and looked out of the car, taking in the eerie scenery. As if rising out of the netherworld, a tall, gothic mansion surged out of the fog, the lamps lighting its large portal floating in a yellowish glare on both sides. The building sent a shiver down the chauffeur's back. He was a seasoned driver and bodyguard, not a man who panicked easily, but this place ... it made him uncomfortable. In a way, it felt as if he had driven the car out of this world into a strange parallel dimension in which the laws of nature had broken down, replaced by the uneasy rules of magic and fantasy.

Still, he had his job, and as far as he was concerned, most strange entities didn't bother with simple servants such as him. As long as he stayed silent and tried not

to draw any attention to himself, he hoped he would be fine. To be perfectly sure, he sent a silent prayer to his God, hoping he would listen and maybe even watch over him.

Through the intercom, he said:

“We have arrived, Ma’am.”

From behind, he heard her rough, powerful voice.

“Excellent, Henry.”

He got out of the car quickly and walked over to her door, scanning the environment. In a way, he wondered why a woman such as Aleksandra would even need a bodyguard like him. She was built like a world class athlete, with massive shoulders and a neck he envied himself. Next to her, Henry looked a bit ... slim, and that wasn’t something people commonly associated with him. Still, a job was a job, and if Aleksandra Petrovna Oryolska wanted to be driven to the spookiest place imaginable, on Walpurgis Night, of all things, then he complied. Of course he did.

And yet, if she had blown this off, he would have jumped back into his seat at the drop of his hat and driven her home as if the devil was on his heels.

Composing himself, he took the door handle, pulled it to him and added the customary bow of the perfect chauffeur.

The woman stepped out swiftly, her huge muscles moving with surprising elegance. Speaking of elegance, Henry had been a bit surprised by her outfit. To normal events, she would invariably be dressed with the usual Slavic conspicuousness, with bright lipstick hues, absurdly deep necklines, and heels no-one in her right mind would even hope to walk in.

Today, she wore a simple black tracksuit, which nonetheless did nothing to hide her fabulous muscles. She barely acknowledged Henry’s present, ran her manicured fingers through her short, auburn hair, and walked towards the mansion’s portal.

For a moment, Henry wanted to ask how long it would take, but then, he realized that it would take as long as it would, and that he was best to just sit in the car

and wait until needed.

Very well. He closed the door, got into the driver's seat and took out his book. He was sure she would call him when needed.

As Aleksandra approached the building's entrance, the door swung open, revealing a large foyer with a marvelous open marble staircase, lit by mighty chandeliers. On both sides of the room, rows of servants were waiting calmly. The bodybuilder smiled as she saw their perfect, incredibly uniform faces and physiques. Both men and women, they were invariably elegant and athletic, with finely carved features and lacking any imperfections. In a way, they reminded her of automatons, or of what an artist would create if they had never seen a real human being, going simply from description. It was interesting. These beings should probably have been alluring, but their flawlessness instead made them appear uninteresting, even disconcerting.

For a moment, she wondered whether the hostess replaced them as soon as they showed a sign of aging. In all those years Aleksandra had attended this event, she had never seen one out of place. It was difficult, but she could swear that at least some of them were still the same as she had seen the first time she had joined in.

Well, she decided to leave that question to the philosophers. In the end, she was way too excited for what was to come to waste time meditating on the hostess' personnel politics. Still, there was a pang of nervousness as she walked past them to the end of the foyer, reaching a large and ancient door carved with strange symbols and scenes from some mysterious past.

Aleksandra had admired this door many times already, and every time, she found herself wondering whether it was actually the oldest part of the building. The place itself seemed locked into a kind Gilded Age, but the wood of the door appeared to be truly ancient. She was no archeologist, and frankly didn't care much about history, but over the years, curiosity had gotten the better of her, and she had wasted a few hours on research. She had found nothing concrete, of course, but the style of the door did remind her of an exhibition on ancient Uruk. Again, what did that even mean today? And yet, despite her renewed visits, she still couldn't shake the sensation that there was some very real and absolutely brutal threat hidden under all this decorum.

Speaking of threats: The musclewoman saw three competitors for the evening waiting by the door. Aleksandra let her gaze rest on them for a moment to figure them out.

Her eyes immediately went to the tallest of the trio. She was a tall, black woman, also wearing a tracksuit, though hers seemed less fashionable and more utilitarian. Her long hair was carefully braided and her face was hard and square. This woman suggested the focus and discipline of a professional athlete, and Aleksandra was quite certain she had already seen her in some kind of sports show. Not that the bodybuilder cared much about other areas ... This woman, though, did have some serious muscles under her suit. Maybe she was a bodybuilder too, even if she was a bit tall for the sport. One had to be at Aleksandra's level to compensate for not being a midget ...

The black woman's eyes met hers. For a moment, there was a tension in the air. Aleksandra held fast and turned to look at the others, breaking their gaze at the last moment.

Aleksandra wanted to focus on the next, but her train of thought was briskly interrupted by the squealing voice of a curvy pink mess of a girl. She was average in every way, except her styling, which was an absolute eyesore. The girl was wearing her long purple-pink hair in long pigtails with pink candy ball hair bands as well as a cat-ear headband. She was also dressed absurdly. A very short dress revealed a pair of legs that could only be described as ... too much. She had a huge ass, very thick thighs, and somewhat impressive calves, while her upper body looked almost normal. The dress, though, was just too bubblegummy and lacy. Also, it was very skimpy, looking rather cheap. Her legs were covered by white thigh-high stockings and she was wearing shiny black Mary Janes. Also, she had this strange posture with her toes pointing inwards.

It was all very odd.

The bodybuilder really wondered what this ... creature would bring to their game.

Also, she was producing another squeal and kept talking inside her phone with that strange voice those ... influencer people produced.

"Hello, everybody, this is Chloe Ann Medeiros, your CAM girl, and I am at this super exclusive special night in this amazing Wednesday Addams lookalike

mansion! This is so nice! Look at all this ...”

She was cut short when one of the servants quietly pointed at a sign that said “No cell phones allowed”.

“Oops! I ... I just found out I’ll have to fill you in later, cos they don’t allow phones here? I don’t know why, but yeah, it probably fits the aesthetic? Dunno. Anway, see you soon, I love you and don’t forget to like and subscribe!”

She turned the phone off, glaring at the servant, adding a poke of her tongue in his direction.

Aleksandra breathed out quietly. The sudden silence was soothing. She smiled to herself and quickly checked out the third participant.

Okay.

The bodybuilder was surprised. Clearly, after the pink horror, this was equally sad, though she was pretty sure that this one at least wouldn’t be noisy ... She looked down at a short Asian woman in her forties or fifties, her hair in a greying bun and glasses on her nose. She looked old, and not really interesting. Also, she was wearing a dark brown turtleneck and a long grey skirt. This woman ignored the others and, to be honest, Aleksandra would probably have overlooked her too.

She seemed like a lost librarian that had wandered in this place and was now trying to get her bearings to return to her books. For a moment, Aleksandra wanted to ask her what she was doing here, but just then, her train of thought was derailed by the most annoying person yet.

“Sasha, darling! You’re here? I thought you would pussy out and stay away this time! Still got something to lose?”

Aleksandra turned around to face Katie Palmer, AKA Lil Miss Palmer, muscle dominatrix to the stars and the closest thing to a rival Aleksandra could accept.

Of course, Katie would do everything to cause a ruckus. That was just her way ... The other women stared at her, shocked by her appearance, while Aleksandra just feigned a bored yawn, hiding her mouth behind her hand.

In her golden eight-inch platform heels, Katie was boosted up to 6’7”, towering over everybody, even the tall black one. Her long platinum hair was cascading down her broad, muscular back, flowing over her huge black jacket assembled from large feathers. That was the only thing Aleksandra considered even vaguely fashionable.

Under it, the problems began: Her heavyweight body was encased in a very short red latex dress that barely covered her crotch. The reason why the dress kept wanting to slip upwards was that she sported the most mind-boggingly large tits anyone here had ever seen. Each tit was perfectly round, supported by twin blocks of pectoral muscle, and looking completely absurd. Aleksandra noted that they were even larger than before, her cup size, if something like that even applied, now well in the later half of the alphabet.

The Russian smirked as she realized that Katie had probably pumped her tits up even more, just to deal with her increasing wrinkliness. It was really astonishing how clumsy that woman tried to ward off aging. While Aleksandra lived a life of discipline and careful beauty treatments, Katie was more of a bulldozer, trying to push her old age away with brute strength. By now, her face was mask-like and hard to parse. Her lips were swollen, fillers had evened out every wrinkle that had escaped the botox injections, and her makeup and contouring was doing some heavy lifting to conceal both her roid abuse and her age. And yet, a smirking Aleksandra sent a piercing look at the woman’s beginning turkey neck. Should have paid the extra money to get her neck lifted while she was at it ...

Instead, Katie had made the dubious fashion choice of wearing a broad leather choker with gold letters on it, each one studded with rhinestones and spelling “QUEEN”. Yeah. Aleksandra had her thoughts about people who had to loudly proclaim their status ...

Aleksandra gave her rival a regretful smile:

“Well, maybe I’m a sore loser ...”

“Oh, don’t let your fiasco from last time keep you down, I say. It’s always nice to see you showing up with new ... gifts.”

Katie closed in on her, her cheap, inelegant perfume invading Aleksandra’s nostrils. The woman towered above her and reached for Aleksandra’s muscular arm. She squeezed it a little, her square-tipped red nails that matched her

squeaking dress digging into the other bodybuilder's bronzed skin.

"My oh my ... Look at you. All of this, in so little time? You really crave a repeat performance ..."

The huge woman licked her plumped lips, her tongue flashing out in a glint of jewelry. Her expression went to hunger ... no ... craving. For a brief moment, the other women had a feeling of worry run down their spines. Aleksandra was unimpressed.

She tensed her biceps, forcing Katie's fingers apart, and replied:

"Well, I've been using these things called weights. Really nice. Perhaps you should give them a try sometime. I heard they'll do wonders even to cheap ... women like you."

The two women stared at each other, the tension mounted. Katie came closer to her, shoving her enormous tits against her rival, but Aleksandra stood firm.

The situation was diffused when the tall black woman cleared her throat. Katie stopped, patted the other woman's flexed biceps and said:

"Anyway, nice of you to be back here. You have so much ... to give. Too bad you seem to have forgotten to moisturize your skin, with all that weightlifting and whatnot ..."

Aleksandra was struggling to stop herself, but just then, the large door behind them opened.

A spot of blood red appeared in the darkness. The woman's lips shone in the lobby's light, and then, she emerged from the gate. The woman was tall ... amazingly so ... tall and strong, her muscles putting everybody else's to shame. It seemed as if she filled up the large double door all on her own. Her skin was perfectly white, like alabaster, and a wave of jet-black old Hollywood locks fell down her titanic shoulders. While her skin was absolutely flawless, it was also a canvas of the most intense definition any of the women had ever seen. Every vein was perfectly delineated under her skin, the ridges of her muscles shifting, giving her a somewhat terrifying aspect.

The woman was wearing a shockingly elegant black silk dress that shimmered in

the light, the fabric flowing over her insane curves. The absurd masses of muscle had nothing brutish to them, instead, the woman's body was a perfect hourglass, her long, incredibly muscular legs completing her amazing proportions. The dress was slit up to her hips, giving the guests a good look of her powerful thighs. As she walked, she seemed to be completely unencumbered by the huge size of her muscles. There was a kind of elegance to her steps which a woman such as Katie would crave all her life and fail to achieve. It suggested a calm, perfect dominance. Absolute control of herself and her environment.

The woman's heel-less seven-inch high shoes clacked on the ancient parquet.

Her rich, deep contralto voice rang out in her strange Mid-Atlantic accent:

"Welcome dears! It's a pleasure to meet you all, newcomers ..." She looked at the trio. "... and regulars! I am Madame X, a simple way to conserve my anonymity ... and I do enjoy the mystique such a name entails ..." Her eyes fell on Aleksandra and Katie, who brusquely felt like clumsy amateurs next to this muscle goddess. The three newcomers were completely stunned. Clearly, nothing had prepared them to the true power and size of their hostess. Sure, they had been interviewed by her individually to figure out whether they matched her expectations, but then, the woman had kept to the shadows, with only her lips and a glint of her eyes visible.

Seeing her like this ... They all realized just how out of their depths they were now. And that all the strange rumors and promises they had heard were true.

Aleksandra managed to tear her eyes from their hostess and caught the other women's expressions. It was clear that Katie had tried to close in on the giantess' height with her absurd heels, and yet, she still looked smaller than their hostess. It was very clear that she craved the woman's body for herself, but Aleksandra knew that this time, she would be the one to triumph!

The other three women were just struggling to comprehend this. The tall black woman was clearly unsure of how to deal with the situation. She was obviously in the presence of something that couldn't be explained rationally, and for a moment, Aleksandra was sure that she had just mouthed a prayer. Well, that was fair enough. She would need any help she could get in the upcoming gauntlet.

The ridiculous little girl with the big legs was salivating, though. She was probably trying to figure out how to steal and adapt Madame X' style for herself

or how to film a reaction video to this. Or some other vapid pursuit. Aleksandra could see the CAM girl's obsession grow as the huge woman spoke.

Finally, the older Asian woman just stood and stared, admiring their hostess' incredible physique, her eyes scanning her amazing definition and her perfect poise. Clearly, this old woman had an eye for muscle, and the professional awareness to appraise it.

Madame X gave them a few moments to enjoy the view, a certain pride still visible in her expression, then she smiled with surprising warmth, her steel grey eyes shining.

"Please come in now, dears. There are tasks ahead, and time is very much of the essence ..."

She held out a large yet elegant hand and ushered them inside through the ancient gateway.

They crossed a shadowy gallery, their footfalls dampened by thick carpets, and while the others had kept their eyes on Madame X, Aleksandra had tried to catch a glimpse of the portraits that decorated the walls. She could barely see them in the twilight of the indirect light, but what she saw suggested that some of the depictions were older than oil paint ... older than paper ... and, to be honest ... older than human art itself.

She banished the thought. She had been here before, and yet, some parts of this place ... they seemed as if born out of a dream, fading from her memory once the morning light came. She wondered how many time she had already tried to grasp just what she witnessed here ...

Now they emerged into the room that had become somewhat familiar to Aleksandra. A large living room, it's walls disappearing in the darkness, except for large windows in the wall opposite the entrance. The stained glass at their top showed strange shapes and figures set in various shades of black and grey.

A horseshoe of couches had been assembled, facing a tall armchair, fit for the enormous size of their hostess. In the middle, there was a low table, whose surface was inlaid with precious materials, the coiled shapes appearing to move under it as if alive.

A gesture from Madame X made it clear to the women that they should sit. Chloe Ann threw herself on the couch casually, but just as she wanted to put her feet on the crimson leather, one look from the hostess made her reconsider, and she sat straight and somewhat humbled.

The tall woman sat down on her armchair, and unseen servants handed each of the guests a glass of wine.

“Dears, I am glad to have you as my guests tonight, and I expect this to be a wonderful and enjoyable night.” She raised her glass, which had appeared out of nowhere. “To luck. To the thrill of the game. To the winner!”

The women raised their glasses in turn.

“To the winner!”

They drank. Katie and Aleksandra exchanged glances. Each one knew who their hostess meant.

“Just so we can all enjoy the evening without misunderstandings, I will quickly recapitulate the rules of the game. You were told already, but ... I think at least one of you ...” She eyed Chloe Ann. “... was a bit distracted by her device at that point ...”

The young girl wanted to protest, but then she shrugged and replied with an amused “I guess ...”

“Over the years, I have settled on games of poker. There were other games before, but I found that this perfectly combines the simplicity of the rules with the intensity of the wager. Since mankind has found so many different ways of plain it, though, I’ll have to clarify. You will be dealt five cards after placing your ante. I require each one to place one copper chip in the pot. Once everybody has received their cards, you may look at them and there is a first round of betting. Should more than one of you remain in the game, you are at liberty to draw. Discard up to five cards, and receive replacements. Another round of betting, and then, once everybody has had the opportunity to either raise, call or fold, the player with the best hand wins the pot.”

There were nods all around. Simple enough.

“Obviously, the hands are ranked as usual, from royal flush as the strongest hand to a mere high card as the weakest. A matter of statistics. Speaking of statistics, you will receive your chips as follows: forty copper chips for each. One chip is a pound of muscle. You will only wager them in multiples of five ...”

With a circular gesture, Madame X summoned a copper coin that looked strangely ancient without seeming worn. She let the chip dance over her elegant white fingers, and it seemed to the spectators that little sparks of blue lightning sprang from the metal as it made its way before disappearing back into her palm.

“Then, you will have five silver chips. Each one is one inch of height. You may exchange them for five copper chips if needed ...”

A brief flash, and a larger, heavier silver coin appeared on her other hand, spinning between her thumb and index before disappearing as suddenly as it had appeared.

“And finally, as the greatest prize, five gold chips, each one representing one year of your life. Of course, one of these could be given for ten copper chips.”

A spinning golden coin appeared on the tip of her index, heavy and large, before vanishing into thin air.

Katie stared hungrily at the coin as it disappeared.

Aleksandra watched the other women intently. It was obvious that they were now understanding just how intense this game would get. They probably now understood why Madame X demanded that her players had to be heavyweight bodybuilders. Losing forty pounds of muscle was something few people could afford, and a weight of at least 140 pounds was necessary to even survive such an ordeal. Especially once one lost the silver chips too. Those could hurt terribly, she remembered.

Losing disastrously at this game could leave one crippled ... or even on the brink of death.

Madame X had given them all a moment to let her words sink in, then she said:

“Copper chips are our game’s lifeblood. They work surprisingly quick and easy. They shift a pound of muscle mass from one player to the other. Sometimes, the

changes won’t be as noticeable at first, but trust me, they will be there. Silver chips, though, are more unpredictable. Yes, you will gain or lose an inch of height, but you can expect some five pounds of mass to come or go with them. Bone, fat, muscle ... Everything that makes you human! Should you, for any reason, reach seven feet, the extra height will give you more girth. It’s very uncommon, but quite impressive to see!”

The woman licked her lips. Did she speak from experience?

“And gold chips?” She looked intently at Katie and Aleksandra. “Our more experienced participants crave these the most, so, dears, keep them close ... The effects tend to be a bit more unpredictable. Magic is not an exact science. Winning one will keep aging at bay for a year, more will make you younger. As some of you will know, though ...” She looked at the small Asian woman. “... with old age comes a loss of height and muscle mass. So obviously, gaining years ... might well have other effects, just as losing them. As a matter of convenience, you cannot get younger than twenty using this magic, but ... you can stay there for a long time. You will see ...”

The tension in the room was now palpable. The women all imagined themselves as the winners ...

“Finally, to bring this to an end, you are disqualified if you fail to produce a copper chip as an ante, that much is clear. The house offers no credit. If you wish to quit, you can do so at the end of the showdown before the next hand is dealt. You will pay a fee, a gold chip or equivalent, and you will be free to go. You may be selected again in a latter year, but ... your grace and behavior will be considered. Finally, should you break your oath ... you will be banned, and there will be a suitable punishment. Magic is not to be trifled with.”

The woman took another sip of her wine, then she looked around. Her guests were eager with anticipation.

“You will now be accompanied to your rooms. In an hour, we will meet again, for our game.”

The strange stewards appeared by the invitees and, with a courteous bow, guided them all out of the room. Madame X stayed, her face suggesting a certain amusement.

Aleksandra followed one of those strangely perfect young men through the labyrinthine mansion. Every time she was here, she tried to keep some kind of orientation, but invariably, she would find herself lost. It was deeply confusing. The corridors seemed to run into themselves, the stairwells led beyond the height of the building, and the endless rows of doors suggested that the place was much larger than logically possible. Occasionally, they would walk past some windows and she would catch a glimpse of a courtyard, a garden, or even a strange landscape she was quite certain was nowhere close to this house ...

By the time the young man opened her room with a smile, her mind was swimming. Struggling to focus, she managed a “thank you”, and stepped inside. She would only need the room for an hour, but it was nice to see that Madame X spared no expense to make her guests feel welcome. The room had a large bed, wide and long enough for someone as massive as their hostess, an equally enormous bathroom with both a walk-in shower with all kinds of mist-spraying nozzles and a huge bathtub that could accommodate someone as massive as Madame X while still resting on four mighty lions’ feet. There was a set of full-length mirrors that allowed their observer to get a good look at themselves from several angles, as well as a robust desk and chair combo.

A window in an elegantly carved wooden frame opened to a moonlit garden full of strange trees and flowers. Aleksandra could swear that she saw some small creatures move through the greenery that didn’t look like anything she had ever seen. She smiled, managing her nervousness. She wasn’t here the first time, and a certain amount of strangeness was only to be expected in a place like this ...

As she walked through the room, she also found a trolley with food and drink, the meal kept warm under a cloche. A card reminded her that she was welcome to partake in the food, but that there would be no breaks during the game and that one should take this into account. On the desk, she also found the same card as last time that detailed the rules of the game.

In a way, Aleksandra understood Madame X’ position. People were here to play, not to stumble about and waste an intense evening arguing or asking silly questions. And yet, she found it a bit condescending. She was serious about this, and the hostess doubting her ... then she thought of the pink creature and sighed. Obviously, for people like that, even beating the rules into their tiny brains was probably not enough ...

Well, there was some waiting time now. Aleksandra wouldn’t eat or drink. Decades of bodybuilding had taught her self-control. Instead, she would check her situation.

The musclewoman approached the mirror and zipped the jacket down halfway. She admired her muscular neck. It was quite possibly her best part. Strong, elegant, framed by a well-developed pair of traps, supporting her strong, square jaw ... She looked like a true athlete. She did fulfill the Grecian ideal in every way. Her short auburn hair just added to the effect, underlining her jaw and the sharp frame of her face. Her blue eyes were cold and piercing, and everything about her suggested power and authority.

Aleksandra sighed. That bitch Katie was right, though ... Her skin was suffering. The drugs she had used to build and maintain her size for this new round had really wreaked havoc on her. There were so many imperfections, little acne scars and blotches, it really looked bad under her makeup. In a way, that was her only weak point and the only part of her body that suggested her actual age.

Physically she was in her thirties, but in reality, she was long past fifty. So far, her documents still mostly matched her looks, even if she had bounced between her thirties over the last two decades. She never went past forty, but sometimes, it got close. Still, Aleksandra was proud of her body and her skill at poker, and she assumed that she would be able to continue like this for a while before she would have to start over with a new identity.

She smiled. That was the nice thing about those Hollywood women: They made it impossible to tell what a fifty-year-old woman actually looked like. Could be anything from a little granny to ... Aleksandra.

It was funny to see how far she had come: Her parents, especially her mother, had always had high expectations. The classic middle-class Eastern European couple with a single kid that had to perform. Sports, ballet, chess, science, languages ... They crammed as much as they could into her childhood, making sure she was the best at everything. Or at least, they desperately wanted this.

As she hit puberty, it turned out that she had excellent genetics for sports, and while her mother was a bit disappointed that she didn’t focus on something that would get acclaim like gymnastics or figure skating, she outdid all the other kids in class, even the boys. She ended up excelling at martial arts.

The medals accumulated, and Aleksandra was on the verge of becoming a real pro.

It all went to shit when her mother caught her in the changing room with one of her competitors. One of the female competitors. Kissing.

That was the end of her career. Every attempt of her coach to explain this and to maybe soothe the old madwoman was pointless. Her mother couldn't accept this, so Aleksandra cut her off. She had no idea what even happened to her parents. It was so far away now, as if from another lifetime.

She ended up living with some girls her age in the worst apartment imaginable, a leaky, moldy, disgusting two rooms in the worst part of the city, but it was cheap and she could pay for her life and her studies on a waitress' salary. It was a bit difficult to handle everything, but she did manage to acquire a master's degree in law and economics eventually. On the way there, though, she supplemented her waitressing income at a nightclub. She originally auditioned to be a dancer, but then, one of the patrons got handsy and her skills kicked in. The poor guy ended up pinned and she did get a job, only as a bouncer, assisting the huge muscleguy there with the women and the sensitive clients.

From there on, it was only a small step to get into bodybuilding. The big guy, Yegor, trained her and got herself everything she needed to move up the weight classes and become a pro. The fact that they shared a taste in women only made things better.

It also turned out that the nightclub was an excellent place to get investment tips, especially by keeping an eye on who was talking to whom, and so, Aleksandra managed to build a portfolio that was as impressive as her body.

The musclewoman grinned. Having her first million had felt like vindication, getting her pro card was the cherry on top.

At some point a little later, she became aware of Madame X' little gaming nights. It had been a bit of a shushed thing among the heavyweights. People were vaguely aware of the games, but only the cream of the crop were ever invited, and if they returned to the competition circuit, they would invariably dominate. It was astonishing to see her rivals to blow the judges away one year, and then come back looking even more massive, with unreal good looks, and sometimes even appearing taller.

Aleksandra was no fool. While it took a while for her to accept that magic was involved, once she understood this, she started asking the right questions, and soon, a very elegant, handwritten letter on exquisite stationery invited her to her first poker night.

Over the next ten years, Aleksandra was the cream of the crop. She won everything. Her strict training schedule, combined with her iron discipline and her excellent genetics, augmented by her skill at seeing through other people's pathetic lies was more than enough to establish her as a household name in bodybuilding. People called her "Aleksandra the Great", "The Iron Queen", or even the "Barbell Ballerina" ...

Those names were ridiculous, but they were well-earned.

Then, after a particularly bountiful evening, Madame X approached her and took her for a little walk in the mansion's gardens. The giantess suggested she retire now before people started asking questions, and Aleksandra had to agree. She wasn't in this to arouse keyboard warriors or to humiliate clumsy amateurs. She was into muscle itself. Into strength. Into the ability to become the best at what she loved. Whether or not some biased judge pinned a number to this, was irrelevant.

Besides, this was her competition now. The game itself was only the grand finale of a year of preparations. Contrary to the other women, Aleksandra insisted on arriving here in peak shape. Creatures like Katie saw this event as an opportunity to win something without earning it. Aleksandra always made sure to outdo them, even before the first card was flipped. She would spend the whole year arduously building her mass, refining her physique, getting every treatment in and out the books to make sure Madame X took her seriously. Plus, outsizing the competition brought a certain psychological edge to their games. Her competitors either found themselves shocked or salivating, and either was ruining their concentrations.

All is fair in love and poker ...

Besides, it amused her to occasionally visit the various internet forums and read how the horny guys there kept salivating over her in their "muscle divas of yesteryear" fantasies, decrying the lack of size and definition in the modern era, and wondering how far Aleksandra the Great could have taken it if she had the

modern supplements and training methods at her disposal.

The thought made her snicker.

If those guys could see her now, they would have one big collective heart attack. She was so far beyond anything they could have thought possible, she could just as well be a different person. At least ... that was what she used to be.

Her mood went back down after this bout of nostalgia.

She took off her clothes and admired her naked, perfectly sculpted body. At 5’6” and 215 pounds of shredded mass, she was incredible ... but she could be so much more. She used to be.

Still, Aleksandra tried to summon her focus by doing her old ritual.

“Huge and ripped!”

She threw these words out, then launched into her most muscular, pushing her muscles out at full force. They swelled up nicely, creating a massive collar of muscle around her elegant neck. She growled at her reflection, stood up straight, and hammered out a front double biceps, then a huge lat spread. She turned sideways, breathed in and slammed her arm down into a side triceps that would have given many male bodybuilders career doubts. Her upper arm jutted out by double to the back, then she followed up with a beautiful and intense side chest, pushing her muscular pecs up as far as she could.

It was amazing! She loved this, and she knew she was the best and the biggest ... and yet, it didn’t really, really feel like it. In a way, she was lying to herself, wasn’t she?

She growled and went for a front abdominal pose, displaying her amazingly ripped waist ...

And there was this nagging voice at the back of her head that just seemed to whisper to her:

“You used to be bigger.”

“Your arms were larger ... and more ripped.”

“Where has your eight-pack gone?”

She glared at her reflection. For a moment, she felt as if she was mocking herself.

Things had gone terribly wrong last year.

She relaxed, stood in front of the mirror, her huge arms hanging from her rounded shoulders, her muscle-packed chest heaving from the effort of her poses. The vein on her forehead faded back under her skin and she felt the red spots that had formed on her skin recede again.

“Fuck.”

A year ago, she had been 5’10”, 260 pounds of perfect muscle. A she-beast. A hulk. A fucking muscle-goddess. She had dwarfed all the others, towering over them, making them shake in their boots as she moved. She had been perfectly for the game, ready to devour them! She would extend her youth, she would round out her bulk, she would finally achieve the kind of perfection she expected of herself ...

She had been ready and prepared.

And it was a total catastrophe. It was Murphy’s Law on all levels. Seriously. Each and every hand was absolutely mediocre, her opponents had managed to bluff her, and as the game progressed, she panicked and stuck stubbornly to horrible hands. She should have cut her losses, but she couldn’t muster the strength to swallow her pride.

Instead, she doubled up, trying to force the competition out of the game and screwing herself on an epic level. It was astonishing. Forty copper chips evaporated, then she even sacrificed four silver ones, burning four inches and twenty extra pounds of muscle, and it was all for absolutely nothing. She just wanted to cry, and even now, a year later, she fought back the tears and the anger at the universe’s injustice.

In the end, she dropped down to her last copper chip, and she regretted everything the instant it happened.

What made matters worse, much, much worse, was that all of this hard-earned,

carefully cultivated muscle went to that fucking bitch Katie.

The shame washed over her as she remembered how she slunk away from the table, having lost sixty pounds and four inches, her bikini hanging from her chest like a sail out of wind, her steps feeling light and awkward.

What made things worse was that the limousine even had a breakdown, so she had to wait in the foyer while things were getting repaired. All the time, she just wanted to be as far away as possible from this horrible place, and yet, she forced herself to show a brave face and to insist to herself that she had everything under control. She was still the best, this was just a setback, she was going to recover, she ... she was lying to herself. She had fucked up, overconfident as she was, and she paid the price for it, even if it was unfair.

To Aleksandra's surprise, Madame X had appeared to see her off. The tall, wonderfully muscular woman had appeared in the foyer, even though Aleksandra was quite sure the game was still going on. She had held out her perfectly manicured, incredibly pale hand and raised Aleksandra from the awkwardly low seat, then gave her something of a hint of a smile and said, in a somber tone:

"Good night, my dear, and I hope to see you again next year."

The drive home had been a very strange experience. The long way through the darkness of the forest that seemed to surround the mansion, then the ride to the city, the streetlights passing over her exhausted face in long, white bars. She felt stupid in her oversized tracksuit jacket, the fabric flopping around her.

At last, she arrived at the apartment block and dragged her luggage behind her, somehow unable to really carry it. It rolled on its squeaky little wheels and only made her more frustrated.

As she finally reached the door, the concierge of the very high-class building didn't even recognize her. She had to identify herself with the ID card and the pass-phrase, and she only wanted to go to bed.

When the idiot finally managed to recognize her, she could see in his eyes that he pitied her without understanding what had happened.

Pity.

Pity was the worst.

They could all be afraid of her, they could be jealous, they could hate her ... but they never, ever should pity her.

The concierge helped her with the luggage, and seeing him struggled with her bags as well was a little relief, but it still stung.

Then, at last, she had landed on her mattress and, after an exhausted, final “fuck”, she had fallen asleep.

The next morning had been rough. She awoke to an intense bitterness. She had really hoped it would all turn out to be a nightmare, but realizing it was real was like an extra punch to the gut. It had taken her forever to clamber out of her bed, and once she understood that none of her clothes fit anymore, she crawled back under the blanket and spent the next hours ordering new outfits. The worst part was obviously that she had ordered new, bigger sets already, anticipating her next triumph and becoming even larger and more powerful.

Yeah. That had worked out so well.

Eventually summoning enough energy to toss them all in the trash and accept that she had fucked up had taken even more time. Once that was done, she hoped she would feel ready to get back in the game, but instead, she abruptly felt everything crashing down on her.

For the last decade, she had thought that she was invincible, that she would continue on that trajectory forever, that she was the best at this, and that she would stay forever young, strong and in charge. That rug had been pulled out under her painfully in just one evening.

Was it the sudden blow of a delayed midlife crisis? Was it just the moment when she understood that things didn’t just work out by skill, discipline and ultimately luck? It was tough to deal with this. She could lose, and she could lose hard, and permanently.

It was pretty clear: If she didn’t manage to fix this come the next year, she was going to get pushed out of Madame X’ exclusive circle, and then, it was a doom spiral all the way down to being old, decrepit and helpless ...

Then again, maybe Aleksandra was being overly dramatic. After all, she had lost before. Nothing that bad, obviously, but it wasn't as if her career had been a straight trajectory after all. She was tougher than she seemed, and she seemed very tough indeed! Also, maybe she lost a few inches and pounds here and there, but that didn't mean that she had become average. No. She still had a lot of experience under her belt, and she had achieved much without resorting to the poker game.

She would grit her teeth, and she would come back!

When Madame X had told her "I hope to see you again next year", she meant "rebuild your body, or you are out!". A warning, a threat, but also a challenge!

Despite her frustration, Aleksandra could feel her motivation come back. As Rocky said: "It's only over when it's over!"

She got out of the bed, stared at her reflection in her big mirror and hit a hard most muscular pose, feeling her diminished body swell up comfortingly.

"Yes! Fuck this! I will be back!"

And back she went.

After a few days of preparing at her place, she returned to her favorite gym. She was wearing baggy clothes now, hiding her humiliation, but also seeing this as a bit of penance. Before, she had worked out in very skimpy outfits, tight, cropped tops, very short pants, everything to make it clear that she was the best.

Now she was all dressed in dark colors, keeping out of sight and desperately showing humility. And yes, she did buy some shoes with rather thick soles. She didn't want any questions.

It turned out that nobody would have thought she was the famous "Barbell Ballerina". Her lifts were much less impressive than they had been, her stamina depleted quickly, and routines she had once managed with only minimal effort turned out to be terrifying. She would need all her willpower to power through them, and would end up completely exhausted when she was done.

Yes, she had kept some of her muscle size, but her losses had wreaked havoc on her basics somehow. Checking on her old notes, she found that she was weaker

than she had been in her real thirties, and the ease with which she had built her champion physique was gone. She was getting wiped out by her real age, and it was shocking.

The sudden dent in her ability to build her body made her understand that there would be no easy way out of this mess. She had hoped she would just be able to brutalize her body into doing what she wanted, but that would probably be impossible. At least not at this rate. She was going to lose what she still had, and she would become a regular, semi-fit middle-aged woman, ready to turn into a granny and sit at home with a bunch of cats before finally getting committed to a retirement home.

Aleksandra took a deep breath, banished her overreaction, and decided that desperate measures were called for.

She took a year-long sabbatical from her trading job, not that she really needed the extra money anymore, and disappeared. She no longer showed up in public in any way, she didn't even hook up with her usual beautiful ladies she met at fancy clubs. She was like a ghost.

She only lived to train, eat, sleep and repeat until she would regain what she had lost.

Even though she had hardly ever been natural, she had usually managed on a lighter regimen of drugs, but now, she was shooting plenty of top-of-the-line stuff to coax her weakened body into the kind of size and power she needed.

At the end of a brutal bulking phase, she had reached 230 pounds, and she still had plenty of time to get ready for her game. Sure, she felt huge, but she really needed to cut all that fluff back down. Some of her strength had returned, and even if she was constantly stressed and angry, she could feel this work.

On the day of her meeting with Madame X to prove that she was still worthy to participate, she was incredibly nervous, but the mighty woman's minuscule nod of approval was all she needed to burst with muscular pride. She was in! She would have her comeback. Her revenge! Her triumph!

The huge woman had smiled at her and explained that her body would recover its balance if she managed to win as much muscle as she could.

To Aleksandra, this was a sign from the heavens! She knew it! If she stuck to this, if she pumped harder than ever, if she fought and won, it would all come back! She would recover what she had lost, and while she was at it ... why not gain even more?

That’s when her motivation went into overdrive.

She had struggled before, but now, she was all-in. She launched into the hardest part of her cutting phase with surprising ease. What should have been an ordeal was a celebration of muscle. She dieted hard, and she marveled as her body returned to its perfection, or at least as close as it could. Striations and vascularity came back, and by the time the game was coming up, she was in contest shape, and she loved it.

Yes, she could see the volume of her losses much better now, and she was still forty-five pounds short ... but that was not the issue. She had her shot at being the greatest again, and she wouldn’t waste it!

After this moment of reflection, Aleksandra faced her reflection once again. She was now smiling. She was still anxious whether this would all work, of course, that was only natural. But she had reclaimed her confidence fully. She examined her expression. Neutral, yet strong. Calm, yet intense. She was in control. And she would need it to defeat those idiots. Especially Katie. That bitch would pay dearly for her horrible waste of her time and muscle.

“Let’s finish this.”

Ever since she started participating in this game, she had found it to be very useful to take off the edge before the game. Calm down, center herself. She wondered whether the others did the same.

Then again, what did she care?

Aleksandra admired her body. She turned this way and that to get a good look of her best parts, of her splendid definition, the powerful lines, the strong shapes she had built.

Now her hands wandered her muscles, climbing the hills and mountains she had created, then exploring the ridges and valleys between them. She could feel the thickness and the resistance of her muscle, breathing in and letting them shift as

her lungs filled and emptied. She loved the way she was alive. Much more alive than other people who had never worked as hard to create their own selves. She was in control of her body on so many levels. Mentally, spiritually, physically, and here, even supernaturally.

Her reflection stared back at her, eyes wide with lust.

She was an artist building a masterpiece, and she had achieved a level that was enough to make her one of the all-time greats. Not that she considered herself aged, but ... an old mistress, in her way. Her hands roamed her body, admiring the tightness and control, and then, slowly, they went over and around her abs, before reaching her crotch.

Her clitoris awaited her. It was already tightening and swelling, even before her rough skin touched it, but as her long, powerful fingers brushed against it, she felt a first, small wave of pleasure wash over her.

“Mmmmh ... Yes ... This is good ... It’s always good.”

Her eyes were closed now, and she saw herself winning the game, racking the chips over to her side and feeling their effect hit her. She was winning big as stacks of chips tumbled under her strong hands. She could see herself laughing as her muscles grew larger, stronger, better! The years melting off her face, her body becoming spry and powerful, tall, beautiful, amazing!

Her current physique would melt away under the sheer power of her expanding muscles, reforming into something godlike and incredible.

She saw herself, shining with an inner light, massive, heavy, her movements having a gravity of their own. Bigger than everybody. Bigger than Madame X.

That was enough to send her over the edge. She stumbled as she collapsed on the floor, her legs giving up under a massive wave of pleasure.

It just felt so good to imagine herself being the best.

Aleksandra took a while to recover. She was resting on the floor, her body glistening with sweat, her fingers wet with her juices. She caught her breath and sighed. Slowly, she got back up, her muscles shifting under her skin. It was amazing to feel her girth and mass as she moved.

With a deep breath, she got into the bathroom and had a quick shower, her legs still trembling, and her mind still visualizing her tremendous power.

As she came back out of the bath, adjusting the black bikini she was going to wear for the game, someone carefully knocked on the door. She stepped over:

“Yes?”

“Madame X requests your presence at the weigh-in.”

“I’m coming. Thank you.”

She chuckled. It was time!

The bodybuilder quickly threw on her black satin robe, checked her reflection once more, then headed out, ready to win!

The servant guided her through the eerie corridors of the mansion, eventually bringing her to a lavish antechamber, whose walls were decorated with strange frescoes half hidden in the darkness. Out of the corner of her eye, Aleksandra caught something of a movement in the blackness. She dismissed this. It was probably just her nervousness, no, her excitement!

A very professional medical scale stood ready, with more of the strange servants close-by. The four other contestants were already there, giving her reproachful looks. She didn’t even care about their opinions. Instead, she crossed her thick arms over her massive chest, looking at the head servant.

This very tall, very muscular man of indeterminate age was waiting, clipboard in hand, dressed in a Victorian valet’s uniform that had been tailored to fit perfectly. Whoever had made that outfit had accomplished the feat of both making him look dignified and impressive.

At the same time, his face was as beautiful and unsettling as the other servants’. Despite having been here before several times, Aleksandra still found these people to be very creepy.

The valet let his eyes sweep over the quintet and called out the first name with a deep, pleasing voice.

“Ruth Jamali Collins.”

The tall black woman reacted instantly and removed her robe, handing it to one of the servants with care. She had picked a dark blue bikini that showed off her well-developed physique. The pink twenty-something girl let out a breathless “Whoa!”, then covered her mouth with a stupid giggle.

“Oopsie! I’m sorry.”

Aleksandra controlled her face to hide her annoyance. What was that stupid girl even doing here? Had she never seen a bodybuilder up close? Why would she take part in such an event then?

Ruth was getting measured, meanwhile, and the gentleman’s gentleman declared:

“Height: 6’2”, weight 195 pounds.”

Now Aleksandra remembered her. She was a famous basketball player that had suffered a career-ending injury during a game. The clip had gone through all social media. After this, she had tried to regain her fitness, then drifted into bodybuilding. The results were ... mixed. Second to last on all relevant competitions was barely worth mentioning.

Well ... She had built a decent physique, even if it was an amateur’s. There were so many flaws ... Aleksandra could appreciate the effort, but ... yeah. The biggest problem was certainly her symmetry. Yes, she had some nice development, but it was painfully obvious that the right side of her upper body was more developed than her left. Classic coaching error. It was not her fault for having this issue, but it was her mistake to get coached by an obvious idiot.

Also, with legs as long as hers, extra work was necessary to build fitting muscles. This was ... sad?

So much work, wasted by bad information.

Still, as far as Aleksandra was concerned, the woman had some acceptable mass, was on-season, and was tall enough to provide her with some quality winnings. One had to see the silver linings.

Meanwhile, Ruth nodded at the steward and stepped off the scale. The man, his face still completely impassive, called the next contestant:

“Chloe Ann Medeiros.”

Aleksandra’s gaze fell on the pink eyesore. Oh Lord ...

The girl raised a finger in a cutesy way and corrected him:

“That’s like totally me, but ... you gotta say it right, you know? After ‘Chloe Ann Medeiros’, you make a short pause, like one breath, and you say ‘The CAM girl’. Cos that’s like my brand. Wanna try it again?”

The man, his face still as if carved out of stone, didn’t react. The girl gave him a grumpy look, which was probably also supposed to appear cute, then breathed out. She opened her robe, then she did a kind of little dance. Something that Aleksandra decided was supposed to be erotic or coquettish, but looked ... immature. Then she winked at one of the servants, who completely ignored her

The older bodybuilder managed to contain a sigh. This woman was a wandering waste of time. And space.

Finally, the short woman managed to reveal her physique. It was a pastel pink micro-bikini, and it looked as if the designer had used exactly as much fabric as this girl had taste. The outfit did allow Aleksandra to get a good look at her physique, though, which was probably useful enough.

Chloe Ann was a typical scatterbrained daddy’s girl, maybe with a trust fund. She obviously fancied herself a celebrity, fair enough, but what frustrated Aleksandra was that she clearly had quite acceptable foundations. If a woman like her actually managed to focus and train for real, she’d be able to produce a passable physique.

This, however, was a joke.

This was what happened if one spent their time monkeying around in front of a camera, instead of watching their nutrition and actually training. Well, even if Aleksandra found this to be rather sad and disappointing, she could somewhat see the appeal of this clown show. Chloe Ann had a curvaceous body and smooth skin, good, and she did have a surprisingly broad back and some

somewhat visible muscles on her arms, shoulders and pecs. These were still getting drowned by her fat and her obvious reluctance to focus her training ...

And then, there was the issue of her lower half.

Aleksandra was obviously a big fan of physical balance. Just pumping up a body part into a caricature while neglecting the rest was not her idea of bodybuilding. And yet, she couldn't help admiring Chloe Ann's butt and legs. She understood where the fame had come from.

Chloe Ann's buttocks were absolutely enormous. You couldn't buy those at the surgeon's office. There was some real power behind those, and they showed that this girl was obsessively dedicated to squatting. Those hips were at least 45 inches around, probably close to 50, and they were thick and hard and almost, almost ripped. Her legs were the same style. Her calves were really impressive, the only body part a woman like Aleksandra would want from her, diamond-shaped, bunched up into twin blocks of muscle, and absolutely massive. Her thighs were just as absurd, and Aleksandra was pretty sure that woman was shooting ridiculous amounts of roids to push her legs' size that way. It was a choice ...

She wondered how that girl even managed to walk without having those thighs constantly rub against each other. She probably actually existed just to tumble from one bed to the next.

Aleksandra listened as the results of her measuring were announced. 5'5", and a weight of 165 pounds, horribly off-season.

Whatever.

The steward recorded the information and Chloe Ann sauntered back, giving the impassive man a good look of her mighty buttocks, which he completely ignored. She seemed a little disappointed and wanted to turn around to maybe tease him with the tiny front of her microscopic bikini, but the man just looked at Aleksandra and called her out.

With perfect calm and a ramrod-straight back, Aleksandra handed her robe to a servant and strutted towards the scale. She made sure that her rivals could see just how outclassed they were. It was her way of psyching herself up for the coming fight. She walked with calm confidence, as if she were stepping on a Ms.

Olympia stage, surrounded by actual competitors!

She observed them as she tensed her muscles, showing off her conditioning and her power. Ruth was looking at her with a tensed jaw, having recognized Aleksandra from older shows, and clearly calculating the kind of wins she must have made in previous games.

Chloe Ann was actually impressed. Okay, it was one of those overdone expressions that those streamers did online, but ... it was genuine. She had clearly never seen anybody with serious interest in bodybuilding, and her look definitely made Aleksandra feel proud. Blowing that idiot's mind was probably easy, not that there was much of it in her skull, but it was nice to see anyway.

Katie's expression was on the other end of the scale. She was admiring her, but not in the same way. Instead, the other musclewoman looked at Aleksandra with an expression that could only be described as ravenous. She wanted to devour her, to tear that muscle from her and add it to her own increasingly decrepit body.

Aleksandra had often felt like a piece of meat in her line of work ... but never like this. This wasn't just annoying, it was creepy. Katie was practically drooling, as if she were looking at the juiciest Kobe sirloin ever. The bodybuilder managed to keep her cool, but couldn't prevent a cold shiver running down her spine.

Thankfully, the middle-aged Asian woman just looked at her, her face completely devoid of emotion.

Aleksandra realized that this poker face was going to be quite difficult to deal with once the game was on. She made a mental note to keep this strange person in her crosshairs.

The steward calmly announced her 5'6" and 215 pounds, a mass that clearly outdid everybody else and caused a few gasps. And soon, it would be even more!

The penultimate candidate was Katie Palmer, and the woman threw her robe off her shoulders like a cheap stripper, tossing it to the floor with a total lack of respect for the servants. She obviously didn't give a flying fuck about the background noise that were other people, and she strutted towards the scale, her

ass shimmying, her giant fake tits bouncing wildly, barely contained by a small red bikini made of shiny material. The two udders were spilling over her grotesque roid-gut, and she clearly saw herself as the sexiest person ever.

Aleksandra couldn’t believe her eyes. That was an insult!

That bitch Katie looked worse than at the start of last year’s game, and she was proud of it. She had wasted all the precious muscle Aleksandra had earned with sweat and strain, and had fucked it up! Her body was fat, distended, and bulky. Aleksandra could feel her heart beat faster and the pulse pound against her neck.

What was that even supposed to be? Had this bitch even touched a dumbbell during this year? Last year had been bad, a kind of undisciplined, constantly snacking on-season, but this year ... it was disgusting.

Aleksandra really struggled to appear calm. Katie had allowed herself to degenerate into a caricature of a bodybuilder. The pointless roid-use, the ridiculous plastic surgery, the desperate attempts to stave off aging ... This whole game was turning into a farce!

Yes, they all managed to somehow clamber over the 140-pound mark, and Ruth, while not terribly impressive had at least acted in earnest. But both that CAM girl and Katie seemed to have been specifically invited to anger Aleksandra. Was this some bizarre joke on the part of Madame X?

There had been a time when this place had hosted true titanesses and queens of the art, not some desperate lumps of water, fat and silicone!

She snorted.

Okay, maybe she wasn’t all innocent of this development. She couldn’t blame the other pros to stay away from a game where they would certainly loose against her, and end up running their hard-earned physiques into the ground. Obviously, such a situation would force them out, and only the dumbest and most amateurish women would fall for this.

And here they were.

Parasites like Katie, idiots like Chloe Ann, and hopeless amateurs like Ruth.

But Katie was the worst. She was just going to use this to prop up her failing body without any effort. Bad idea. It was time for Aleksandra to make this right.

“5’11”, 200 pounds.”

Aleksandra could see the four inches she had lost to Katie last year. At least, she didn’t loose those, and the bodybuilder could get them back. And she would!

At last, it was time to call up the final contestant, that stone-faced Asian woman. To be honest, at this point, Aleksandra was losing hope. If the competition didn’t improve, this should probably be her last visit around here. It just wasn’t any fun to dominate some girl idiot, a failed sports personality, a lazy fart and a housewife!

Her thoughts trailed off as the woman took off her robe and handed it to one of the servants.

The steward called out her name:

“Linda Eun-Jung Park.”

Aleksandra stood and stared, as did the others. The woman was wearing a simple black competition bikini, no frills, just the same style as her. That outfit framed a body that shocked Aleksandra.

Linda sported a deep and wide chest with chiseled, feathered pecs, broad shoulders with pumpkin-shaped delts, and a belly that was covered in abdominals bulging like cobblestones and framed by a perfectly carved set of obliques, her impressive adonis belt on full display.

Her swollen traps almost swallowed her bull neck, and the muscles on her arms bulged even when relaxed, pushed outwards by a pair of flaring lats that spread like a cape. As she walked to the scales, her meaty quads shifted under her skin, hanging over her knees in large tear drops, her calves were just as impressive, shaped into hard, sharply defined diamonds. She had this perfect bodybuilder’s swagger, and every step only made her legs look more massive and powerful.

Aleksandra bit her lip. This woman was amazing. This was some real competition. This was what the tall bodybuilder craved. The idea that she would soak up this mass of perfectly shaped muscle for herself, to build up her own

body with this, and to reduce Linda to a scrawny waif, barely able to stand on her own made Aleksandra shiver with delight. She struggled to hide her thoughts from the others, though she could tell that Katie shared them in that moment. That bitch! She didn't deserve this ...

Linda stepped on the scale, and Aleksandra could tell that physique was the real deal. This was the result of decades of hard, focused work. There was an extremely solid foundation under that mass, and she could tell that there was almost no bloat to this body. Linda had clearly made sure that she earned every pound of muscle on her body. Also, whatever dieting strategy she had used had really helped to optimize her looks. The overall effect was blocky, but not in a bad way. The conditioning, her short size, and her pleasing proportions all worked together to give her a look that made her appear taller and more powerful than she was.

The assistant declared:

"5'1" at 155 pounds."

Linda nodded at him, a faint smile on her lips, then she stepped back down.

The steward declared:

"Now that you are all officially weighed, allow me to guide you to the room where the game will be played."

There was some agreement, and the man walked ahead, down another hallway decorated with further strange paintings that were somehow too dark to parse but caused the onlooker to shiver.

As they followed the man, Chloe Ann approached Linda from the side, her strange, oversized ass bouncing and jiggling all over the place. Aleksandra observed the scene with curiosity. Knowing one's enemy was a great help in the upcoming game.

"Hi, Linda! Hi. I'm Chloe Ann, but everybody calls me the CAM girl. Or just CAM. Or Cammy? Yeah!" The older woman barely looked at her. "You're so buff, though! And old. Like really old? No offense, sorry!" Linda kept up her walk, her body swinging with every step. "Anyway, your body is like totally awesome, for real! Are you a pro bodybuilder or something like that?"

“No.”

The answer was brief and quite rough. It didn’t discourage Chloe Ann.

“Okay, so ... why are you so big?” She underlined the question with a puffed-up mock most muscular pose.

“My ex-husband was always away for work, so I started pumping iron to pass the time.”

“Wow! That’s like, so crazy?”

“Mhm.”

Aleksandra was getting increasingly fascinated by this woman. Just a bored housewife? That couldn’t be true ... There was more to that woman.

“Soooo ... how long did it take you to get so buff?”

The woman slowed down a bit and considered the young one.

“How old are you, girl?”

“Me? I’m like, 24 years old?”

“I was two years younger than you when I started training, and now, I’m 56.”

“Wow ... that is like ... uh ...” Chloe Ann started pondering the calculations.

“Thirty-four years.”

Now she had Aleksandra’s full attention: That woman was actually her real age, and she looked like a Ms. Olympia competitor, without any supernatural help. That was incredible! However, her thoughts were getting blocked out by Chloe Ann, launching into a bizarre tirade:

“Wow! That’s like a lot! I mean, a couple of years, I was an e-girl, doing video games online and stuff. But then, they had this ‘Squat Month Challenge’ and I did this cos it was viral, and I gained a ton of influencers and it was like a lot of fun, and everybody loved it ...” She gave Linda a look that suggested that the older woman had doubtlessly heard of this accomplishment. “And then I started

working out more and more, and I became a ‘fitness influencer’.” The air quotes alone were enough to make Aleksandra suppress a sigh. Chloe Ann was unstoppable, though.

“So I grew my big butt and my thick thighs, and everybody just kept loving it and I saw that I was way smaller than the other girls online, so my cousin from Rio, he’s the best ... and my family is from Brazil, by the way, he told me that all the other girls were using steroids to get super big butts and thighs, and I wanted that too! My personal trainer got me the best steroids and I started ‘juicing’, as we call it in the ‘biz’.” More air quotes. Aleksandra breathed deeply to control her urge to strangle her.

“Once I got into that for real, I grew my butt bigger, and my fans went wild! They loved it and I got more donations and I started ‘juicing’ even harder, and I got really ‘swole’! I really love it, but I can’t like use any more, cos I don’t wanna get all hairy and gross and manly. Yuck! Problem is, I’m not growing any bigger anymore, but happily, I got invited to this poker thing with that Madame X, and now, I’m gonna win and get bigger than ever. The biggest in the world! It’s gonna be amazing!”

She smiled at Linda:

“Do you use steroids too? You look like you do, cos you’re like really old and super buff, and old ladies are like usually super tiny, weak and flabby and ...”

Her blabbering was abruptly interrupted when Linda grabbed her arm. They stopped, and the rest of the group stood around them, watching what was going to happen.

Linda flexed her arm and made her biceps pop up. Aleksandra assumed at least 17 inches around, and really sharply cut and defined.

“Squeeze it.”

“W-what?”

“Squeeze my arm, girl. Squeeze it. Hard. Try to make a dent in it.”

Chloe Ann complied, putting her hand around the old woman’s arm and squeezed.

“Whoa! It’s like a rock ... or something.”

Linda nodded, looking pleased with herself.

“Time and hard work built this, not steroids.”

Aleksandra was happy that all the other women were looking at the pair so no one could read her expression. This couldn’t be true. No one could build a body like this without chemical help, especially not a woman at that age!

“True muscle, true power. Now flex your arm!”

“Huh? My arm?”

“Yes. Flex it. Now!”

There was a hostile flash in Linda’s glasses. Chloe Ann was shrinking back in front of her. She complied, her arm swelling up as it should, coming close to Linda’s size, but looking all fleshy, soft and squishy. Linda placed her fingers around Chloe Ann’s muscle and squeezed hard. It didn’t look like much, but the girl instantly screamed in pain as the old woman’s strong, calloused fingers compacted her limb.

“Ouch! Ouch! You crazy bitch! What the fuck are you doing?”

Chloe Ann managed to free herself, though that was actually because Linda released her. She glared at the old woman.

“This is what steroids build. Fake. Weak. Useless.”

The old woman let her eyes sweep over the other competitors.

“I was told that this event was the ultimate in muscle, with only the best of the best being invited. Instead, I see a bunch of roid-head posers. This is disappointing.” She even eyed Aleksandra, who felt attacked.

Everybody stared at her, but Linda just ignored them, continuing to the door at the end of the hallway. Aleksandra struggled to wrap her mind around this. If this woman wasn’t lying, she was some kind of freak of nature, some truly gifted individual. She had read about all kinds of weird mutations, Myostatin-related

muscle hypertrophy or something ... maybe that was the case with her? If it was right ... then she needed that. Maybe, just maybe, she could even acquire this ability for herself!

She needed this desperately!

Silence fell. It was heavy and oppressive, and the women slowly realized that this corridor was way longer than was logically possible. The strangeness of the place started to really affect them.

The previously quiet Ruth smiled awkwardly for a moment, then she tried to break up the situation with a little small talk. That was her go-to strategy in her basketball career. After all, even when they were rivals in this, it couldn't hurt to keep it friendly.

She closed up to Linda and gave her an admiring nod:

"Well ... Linda ... I gotta say, you have a pretty amazing physique, and doing all of this without steroids is even more impressive! Have you ever competed somewhere? I think I would remember seeing you ..."

The old woman just answered with a barking laugh, completely devoid of humor:

"I don't care about doing tricks on a stage like a trained dog or being some pervert's living sex doll, for that matter!" She nodded at Katie. The dominatrix glared back at her. Katie really started to despise this competitor, even if her muscles were amazing.

Linda stopped and put her fists to her hips, then flexed, expanding her chest and lats and making her already beefy, mature muscles look absolutely massive.

"I only care about this. And I can't wait to take all I can."

As Aleksandra saw the other woman's muscle fibers rippling under her skin, her pecs swelling up insanely and her whole body turning into an absurd mass of muscle, she felt her clit throb hard. She wondered whether that was part of Linda's tactic. Getting under the skin of her opponents was an excellent idea, and it was working! On the one hand, Aleksandra wanted to punch the smug bitch right in the face, on the other hand, she desperately wanted to fuck her

hard, even if Linda really wasn't her type. It was just so intense to run into someone as passionate as her. Or it was the steroids talking ...

She breathed deeply, feeling her muscles move, and trying to center herself. She had almost made a scene because of that idiot Katie before ... And she definitely couldn't afford offending her host tonight.

Luckily, Linda started walking again, and at last, they reached the door. It swung open and the servant with the clipboard bowed to them.

"Come in, dears, and let's get ready to play ..."

Madame X' voice was warm and deep, and it made them all forget the tension for a moment.

They entered a round room with a large, robust poker table in the middle. The green felt had a certain roughness to it, as if it had been used for decades. Heavy chairs were arranged around it, with one particularly massive one for Madame X. Mirrors were placed by the door in such a way that the women would be able to admire themselves without seeing each other's cards. The room had a very high ceiling, two stories high, painted with some frescoes fitting for a classic European palace, maybe even a church. The painter definitely had a thing for muscular women, much in the way of Michelangelo, though probably even more so ...

The motifs certainly weren't Christian, though. The walls were decorated with astrological symbols and alchemical signs, and goddesses were carved into the wood and worked into the metal. The scene in the dome showed a dance of warriors and lovers around the mighty Fortuna, cornucopia and rudder in hand. That woman, too, was depicted with amazonian proportions, and her face did feel familiar to Aleksandra on a deeper level. Next to her was the large wheel of fortune with its symbols of boon or bane, and a group of familiars.

Aleksandra had been here many times before, and while she couldn't be sure, she suspected that this place kept changing from year to year. It was hard to tell, since it was always kept in this deep shadow, but she was also quite sure that the paintings sometimes changed just like that ...

The huge woman signified to her guests to sit down. At her left, she had Ruth, then Chloe Ann, Aleksandra, Katie, and finally Linda.

The women complied, finding the chairs to be comfortable. Despite them all wearing only bikinis, the room had a pleasant temperature, and they focused on the task at hand.

“Dears, I will now lead you through the Oath to Hecate, which will bind us all through magic. It will make sure we all comply to the rules and results of the game, and to enforce them without mercy. If you want, this is the last occasion for you to leave this house. There will be no ill effects, but of course, you will never be allowed to participate again. Leave now, if you must.”

There were a few tense moments as the players exchanged nervous looks, but finally, they all remained in their seats. Madame X smiled like a cat that got the cream.

“Marvelous, dears. Now, let us begin.”

She produced a deck of cards and placed it in the middle of the table. The cards were strange to look at. Their back was perfectly black. Not just dark, not simple printer’s black. They looked like holes in reality, into the starless depths of space ... Just looking at them made the women’s eyes water, feeling a terrible pull on their minds.

Madame X asked Ruth to put her hand on top of it. Next, Chloe Ann was told to place her hand on Ruth’s, then it was Aleksandra’s turn. To her disgust, she felt Katie’s palm on top of her own hand, and finally Linda added hers.

At last, Madame X set her giant hand on top of the stack they had formed.

“You will repeat each line after me.”

The women nodded, then the tall woman begun enunciating the terrible oath to the ancient goddess.

“Three is thy number, mighty Hecate

Goddess of the Crossroads

She who walks between the Night and the Darkness

Blood and Terror of the Mortal Men

Moon Queen and Secret of Women

We swear to you, Oh Night Wanderer, Oh Myriad of Shapes

Consecrate this Meeting with thy Power!”

The light in the room faded, the air felt colder, and the wind outside roared and howled as the words were spoken.

Madame X lifted her hand and formed a magic sign with her fingers, then she called out the women to remove their hands in the opposite order.

As Ruth’s hand left the deck, there was a sudden flash of lightning and a mighty crash of thunder that made the panes of the mirrors shake.

As the player’s vision returned, they found piles of gold, silver and copper chips neatly arranged in front of them.

The game was on.

HAND 1

“Ante up, ladies.”, said Madame X, her deep contralto voice echoing in the chilling stillness of the room.

Each one of the five women took one of their copper poker chips and placed it in the center of the table.

Aleksandra’s token felt cold and abnormally heavy in her hand, as if it actually weighed the pound of muscle tissue it represented. It was something she had noticed every time she had paid the first ante at one of Madame X’s poker games, but she had never inquired about whether the same thing happened to the other players. Unsurprisingly, the very nature of the game encouraged distrust and secrecy.

Without a word, Madame X shuffled the deck a few more times and skillfully dealt the five other women. The cards slid across the table, landing perfectly in front of each player. Aleksandra stared for a moment at the face down cards in front of her, looking like rectangular holes leading to an abyss of pure darkness.

She took a deep breath, preparing her mind to control any expression on her face, no matter how small, that might give her away later. Such an early precaution might seem excessive anywhere else, but not at this table.

She felt a chill run down her spine as she saw the cards she had been dealt. A Two Pair. Black Aces and black Eights and a Jack of Diamonds, the Dead Man's Hand, the same one that "Wild Bill" Hickok had when he was shot in the back of the head. She wondered if this was a bad omen or a sign of fate, before shifting her gaze to the other players.

Ruth had a serious, guarded expression, holding her mouth firmly closed, but the rapid movement of her eyes gave her away. She had obvious doubts about the strength of the hand she had been dealt.

Meanwhile Chloe Ann was giggling and fidgeting with hers. Aleksandra, observed her with suspicion, either she was very naive or very clever, but it was too early to figure that out. Still, it was clear that she had something good, even if Aleksandra couldn't tell how much. She decided to keep an eye on the bubbly Brazilian brat for the time being.

Alexandra's eyes met Katie's as she looked to her left. The plastic muscle bimbo regarded her with a petulant smirk, raised thin eyebrows and a half-closed glance, loaded with eyeshadow. She arched her back and rolled her wide shoulders back, making her large fake breasts push up, straining her red bikini top. Another one of her old intimidation tactics which may have had some effect back in the day, before age and sloppiness took their toll.

Aleksandra couldn't resist playing along with her old rival, and mimicked her movements, straightening her back, rolling her shoulders and making her meaty pecs bounce, as to showcase her superior physique. Katie's smile dropped and she turned her face in annoyance, nose high in the air, flouncing out her blonde hair with a bejeweled hand.

Finally, Alexandra focused her gaze on Linda, the mature Asian woman had an impressive poker face, her features appearing as chiseled and hard as her massive body, unreadable as a stone wall. At that moment Aleksandra knew that Linda was going to be a tough nut to crack.

There was a moment of still silence, with all eyes on Ruth, the player who had to take the first action of the game.

“I raise five.”, said Ruth with a less than enthusiastic tone, throwing five copper chips into the pot. Unlike Linda, she was revealing herself as a weaker and weaker player by the moment.

“I call it!” Giggled Chloe Ann with a delighted grin.

“I call it.” Aleksandra replied with the most neutral tone of voice she was capable of, fully aware that she was now swimming with sharks.

“I call it.”, purred Katie in her deep breathy voice, always a show woman.

“I call it.”, declared Linda, her voice dry as dust.

Madame X nodded with approval as the first betting round ended. “This is the now the draw round, dears. You may discard your unwanted cards for new ones.”, She said, her full lips parting in a pearly smile.

Aleksandra decided to keep the Dead man’s hand, out of some morbid sense of foreboding. Chloe Ann kept her cards too, almost bouncing in her chair with excitement. The other players seemed far less attached to theirs, Linda and Katie discarding two cards each and. Ruth three.

While the other players were discarding their unwanted cards, Aleksandra took a moment to examine hers. After so many years as a player, she was very well acquainted with Madame X’s cards, unique and mysterious as their owner. They were somewhat larger and thicker than regulation cards, much more ornate and seemingly hand drawn. Although she didn’t know how, Aleksandra was convinced that the same deck had been in use throughout all those years, even if the cards didn’t show any wear from use.

The beginning of the second round of betting pulled her out of her reverie.

“I raise five.”, said Ruth. Even if she tried to hide it, her voice betrayed that her new poker hand had been an improvement.

“I raise ten!”, Chloe Ann chirped in, pouting smugly.

Aleksandra was taken aback. The bets at the beginning of a game tended to be more conservative, while the players tested each other. Being a newcomer this girl couldn’t know that, but her action was still unexpected.

“I call it.”, replied Ruth, with a hint on a annoyance, pushing five extra copper chips into the pot.

Aleksandra hesitated for an instant, a Two Pair wasn’t really worth gambling so many copper chips, her experience as a player told her so loud and clear. Then, a fleeting vision invaded her mind, showing her muscles bulging with their lost power replenished, getting harder and bigger, and she caved in.

“I call it.” Her own voice sounded hollow and strange to herself.

“I call it.”, Katie said hastily, in a tone in which Aleksandra recognized her own craving.

“I call it.” Linda’s voice could have been a recording of her previous intervention.

A pile of eighty copper chips sparkled in the middle of the green mat, Aleksandra felt her mouth watering. It represented a net gain of sixty-four pounds of muscle, discounting the retrieval of her bets and ante.

“Let us see those cards, dears.”, said Madame X with a smile, giving her players the cue to begin the showdown.

Ruth put her cards face up on the table first, Jack of Spades, Jack of Clubs, Five of Diamonds, Seven of Clubs and Nine of Diamonds. A strong Pair, nothing particularly remarkable, just better than her starting hand. Aleksandra’s heart skipped a beat, her hand was better than Ruth’s, she could already feel her luck changing already.

Then Chloe Ann put her cards face up with a coy giggle. A Royal Flush of Hearts, the best possible hand in poker.

Aleksandra’s stomach sank. “Beginners’ luck!”, Katie murmured to her left.

Aleksandra exhaled sharply before putting her cards on the table, followed by Katie and Linda. She took a quick glance at Katie’s cards, just a weak Pair, Two of Diamonds, Two of Hearts, Four of Clubs, Six of Spades and Nine of Clubs. She had to be really needy to bet with a hand like that.

Then her eyes moved to Linda’s hand, King of Diamonds, King of Clubs, Queen

of Spades, Queen of Diamonds, and Ten of Diamonds. A Two Pair hand like hers, but stronger. She found bitter comfort in knowing that she wouldn't have won even if the Brazilian brat hadn't had that lucky break. Not that it mattered any longer. A shimmer washed over the pile of copper chips, and Aleksandra braced herself to pay off her debts.

It was a sensation she hadn't experienced in a year, and that she would really prefer to spend the rest of her life without doing it again. But unfortunately, it was one of the essential parts of this game, in order to win, one must risk losing.

Ruth was the first to be drained of the value of her lost chips. The tall black woman flinched and gripped the edge of the table with her strong hands as a shocked gasp escaped her mouth. Yet, the tense muscles in her chest, shoulders, and arms appeared to relax, cuts, striations and popping veins fading away, even though her face was contorted into a grimace of discomfort. The process only lasted a few seconds, and at the end of it she let out a deep exhale of relief. To a casual observer her appearance would seem mostly unchanged, but Aleksandra could clearly see how her physique had become softer and even more amateurish.

Distracted as she was in assessing Ruth's transformation, the draining landed on her like a punch to the face. She clenched her teeth, gasping for breath, as she felt hundreds of frozen needles piercing her flesh. She had to close her eyes for a second while a wave of nauseating weakness washed over her. For a moment that seemed like an eternity, all she could think about was how the gains of an entire year's worth of grueling work were being ripped away from her.

Aleksandra opened her eyes just in time to see Katie go through the same ordeal, with a certain perverse satisfaction on her part. The blonde bimbo let out a loud gasp as her body trembled, but her transformation was different from that experienced by Ruth and her. Katie's muscles retained their volume, diminishing only in density. Aleksandra saw her biceps deflate like punctured tires, and her entire body sag slightly under the effect of gravity. Although she had not lost any gold chips, this gave the impression that she had aged a couple of years as well.

Linda's turn came at last and Aleksandra was eager to see her squirm a little, a wish she was sure the other players shared. The mature woman's body tensed suddenly and her jaw clenched as she let out a sharp breath through her closed teeth and tightened lips. A series of spasms ran through all her muscles, as if

they were desperately resisting being drained, to no avail.

Linda's bulky physique contracted into itself, the same smaller frame that contributed to her massive look also accentuated her shrinkage. Although her neck and traps lost a perceptible part of their thickness, where her diminishment was most evident was in her pecs. Her black bikini top now hanged awkwardly, no longer pushed upwards by a proud shelf of muscle.

If Aleksandra remembered correctly her measurements at the weigh-in, Linda now weighed 139 pounds, 1 pound shy of the minimum weight required to enter in this game. It amused her that if Linda decided to participate in one of those bodybuilding contests she despised so much, she would have to settle for the Middleweight category.

Linda now looked older and wan, and despite her studied poker face, a little scared too. Aleksandra strongly hoped that the she wouldn't withdraw from the game too soon, frightened by her loss, so she might have a chance to take some of her remaining excellent muscle mass.

"So, can I like, get my chips now, or what?", Chloe Ann asked with a hint of annoyance in her voice. She had been watching her rivals shrink and squirm in pain with a bit of disgusted fascination, and by now she was eager to reclaim her earnings. After Madame X gave her a court nod, she extended her hands and greedily dragged the pile of copper chips towards her. They shimmered again for a couple of seconds and then faded to their regular shine.

Chloe Ann looked down, inspecting her body, flexing her arms and poking her fleshy chest. She pouted with disappointment and stared at Madame X with a reproachful air.

"Well? That was it? I don't feel anything! When am I going to get my mus-" A spasm shook her body. She threw her head back and her arched her back, letting out a high-pitched moan.

"Oh ... My ... God!", she managed to babble, caught a whirlwind of bliss, rubbing her hair, face, neck and chest.

Listening to Chloe Ann's broken gasps of ecstasy, Aleksandra couldn't help but to remember the first time she won a poker hand at Madame X's table, so many years ago. Winning was always extremely pleasurable, but a part of her had been

chasing that first high ever since, one she knew was inside every other player.

Chloe Ann's body was filling up everywhere, with each moan packs of hard muscle shifted and expanded under her smooth skin. It seemed that most of her gains were going into her upper body, with her neck, traps, lats and shoulders popping into full bloom. Her once smooth torso widened and became carved with the crevices left by rising abs and serratus. She stretched her arms, fists clenching and unclenching as her forearms tensed, then flexed her newly massive biceps with quiet satisfaction.

As far as Aleksandra knew, Chloe Ann's new body could only exist thanks to supernatural help. Of course, there were some young bodybuilding prodigies making a big debut from time to time, but it was almost impossible for a 24-year-old woman to develop such a physique, human biology simply wouldn't allow it. The youth of Chloe Ann's muscles, combined with her higher body fat gave her a full, ripe, bulging look, unlike anything she had ever seen. If she managed to keep those gains, the world would be at her feet. Just like with Linda before, Aleksandra felt a sudden fear that Chloe Ann would realize her immense luck, and decide to quit the game while she was still ahead.

"This is so cool!", Chloe Ann exclaimed triumphantly once her transformation was over. Aleksandra realized that her voice had turned huskier, about an octave lower. Surprisingly, Chloe Ann noticed too.

"Wow! I sound so ... deep!" She cleared her throat and tested her new voice. "Don't forget to like! And subscribe!" She vocalized in an extremely affected tone, flexing each arm as to punctuate her words. "Hell yeah! My followers are going to go crazy about this!", she said as she smiled smugly at the other players, indifferent to their sour faces.

At that moment Aleksandra noticed much more subtle change that had taken place in Chloe Ann. There was a glint in her eyes while looking at her and the others, a predatory smile with bliss giving way to hunger. She was now hooked into the game.

HAND 2

Madame X took the cards back and started shuffling them. She took more time than necessary, as to let her players process the transformations that had occurred to their bodies.

Aleksandra looked to her left and caught Katie poking her arms and chest, apparently assessing the damage her loss had caused to her physique. The aging bimbo pinched her right biceps with her long red nails, and cringed at how soft and spongy her flesh had become. It looked like the arm of a fat old woman, and probably felt like one too.

“Nice bingo wings, grandma!”, snickered Chloe Ann, who had been watching her as well, with cruel amusement.

“You better watch your mouth, brat!”, Katie blurted out, her face flushed with anger as she pointed her finger at her. Her quick movement made her now sagging triceps jiggle like a flabby water balloon.

The sight of this made Chloe Ann throw back her head, bursting into a fit of raucous laughter, pointing back at her.

“Enough.”, said Madame X, her voice calm but with an edge that sent a shiver down the spine of all the players. Chloe’s laughter died like an extinguished candle. “Be mindful of having the proper decorum while in my house, dears.”, she said, staring at the empty space. The room suddenly felt darker and colder.

“Uh ... yeah ... like, sorry, I’m sorry.”, muttered Chloe, all her bluster gone.

Katie gave silent respectful nod to their host, while crossing her weakened arms under her large fake breasts, as if trying to conceal them.

“Much better, dear. Now, ante up, ladies.”, said Madame X.

Each one of the five women placed one of their copper chips in the center of the table. Without missing a beat, Madame X shuffled the deck once more and dealt the five players their cards.

Aleksandra looked at the cards she had been dealt, Ace of Hearts, Queen of Diamonds, Four of Clubs, Seven of Spades, Nine of Hearts. A high Card, one of the weakest types of hands in poker, but with a couple of strong cards. She could work with this.

Aleksandra’s eyes flicked across the table quickly, reading the subtle cues of her opponents. Ruth’s jaw twitched almost imperceptibly, Chloe Ann pouted childishly, Katie smirked, undoubtedly bluffing and Linda sat in silence, her eyes

sharp and focused.

“I raise five.”, said Ruth without much conviction. It was clear that she wasn’t comfortable in her position of being the first player to bet, and that she would have preferred another from which she could adjust her reactions to those of her opponents.

“I call it.”, said Chloe Ann, almost sighing.

“I call it.”, Aleksandra replied, trying to keep her voice as neutral as possible. She was aware that her hand was quite mediocre, but she decided to take a risk and hope that the bet wouldn’t rise too much in this first hand.

“I call it!”, Katie said without losing her smirk-

“I fold.”, declared Linda, while pushing her cards face down towards the muck.

A murmur rippled through the table and Aleksandra’s eyebrows raised slightly. This was was an unexpected move this early in the game, she wondered what Linda’s plan was, while staring at her stony face. Linda seemed to notice that she was being watched and gave her a quick hostile look.

“Draw round, dears.”, said Madame X with a flashing smile.

Aleksandra decided to discard her three weakest cards, Four of Clubs, Seven of Spades, Nine of Hearts, and to her delight he received Ace of Clubs and Queen of Spades and an Eight of Hearts, giving her a very strong Two Pair.

She couldn’t help a slight tremor on her lips that was about to turn into a smile, and hoped that none of her opponents had noticed it. Chloe Ann traded three cards too, Katie two and Ruth only one.

This time Aleksandra didn’t focus on her opponents, but on Linda, how she sat perfectly motionless, dissecting all their movements and gestures, watching over them like a hawk.

The second round of betting started, pulling her out of her reverie.

“I raise five.”, Ruth said with a guarded tone.

“I call it.”, Chloe Ann said with an edge of nervousness in her voice.

“I raise ten.”, Aleksandra declared casually, pushing her chips into the pot.

“I call it.”, Ruth, Chloe Ann and Katie said, unenthusiastically.

Since Linda had folded early, the chip stack was smaller than the previous hand, but its 65 copper chips still sat in the middle of the table, sparking and alluring.

“Let us see those cards, dears.”, Madame X said with a playful grin.

Again, Ruth was the first to put her cards face up on the table, Ten of Spades, Ten of Hearts, Six of Diamonds, Six of Clubs and Four of Hearts, a Two Pair.

Chloe Ann sighed as she placed her cards, King of Spades, King of Hearts, Three of Diamonds, Three of Clubs and Seven of Diamonds, an unimpressive Pair.

Aleksandra felt a sudden vertigo, her hand was stronger than the other two. He placed her Two Pair on the table, while her pecs twitched in anticipation of gaining new mass.

However, her triumph was short-lived. “Hah! Read them and weep, girls!” Katie’s loud voice echoed in her ears, as she placed her cards with a smug smile. Three of a Kind, Nine of Clubs, Nine of Spades, Nine of Diamonds, Jack of Hearts and Five of Diamonds.

A shimmer washed over the pile of copper chips, and an instant later Ruth flinched and gasped. Again, her muscles shrank and softened, it was only thanks to her larger body that her losses didn’t seem so severe.

Chloe Ann was the next, and since it was her first time being drained, she couldn’t help but let out a cry of disgust, followed by a string of expletives. “Ouch! Ouch! Shit! Fuck!”

Her muscles contracted, though they kept their firm, bulging appearance. Her physique was still impressive, but only a shadow of what she had boasted just a minute ago. Thanks to her experience as a gambler, Aleksandra was now sure that Chloe Ann’s previous win had been just a stroke of luck, and that from now on she will only lose more and more of her chips. If she were smart, she would

leave the table right now, but nothing about her attitude seemed to indicate it.

Now it was Aleksandra's turn to be drained, but she was prepared this time, she gritted her teeth, closed her eyes, and did her best to let it pass over her body without fighting it, like a hateful wave of weakness. A few seconds later she opened them again, feeling more exhausted than after the hardest weight lifting session.

Aleksandra then noticed Katie looking at her, smirking and licking her plump fake lips. She felt as though a fire were burning in her belly, and gave Katie back a vicious glare, swearing to herself that she would get even with her before the night was over.

Lost in her desire for revenge, Aleksandra missed how Linda's body paid her copper chip from the ante, deflating in an almost imperceptible way. For all intents and purposes, the middle-aged woman's body was still a marvel of vigor and muscular development.

Without missing a beat, Katie threw her thick, flabby arms toward the pile of chips, greedily grabbing them with her claw-like red nails and dragging them toward her. "Come to mama, my pretties!" She cackled in a breathy voice.

Aleksandra took a quick look at Madame X's pale sculpted face, who had stopped smiling for the moment, obviously annoyed by the winner's lack of decorum.

Meanwhile Katie was unsurprisingly oblivious to anything that wasn't the shimmering pile of copper chips in front of her, staring with delight at their fading shine. As soon as the new muscle mass began entering her body, she arched her back and threw her head back like Chloe Ann had done before, letting out a loud and lascivious moan.

Aleksandra rolled her eyes at this, well accustomed as she was to Katie's theatrical antics, always trying to one-up everyone. However, she knew that the cries of ecstasy were entirely genuine, and could not help despising herself for admiring the transformation taking place in the body of her bitter rival.

Katie's entire body began to shake with rapid spasms and tremors. Discounting the retrieval of her bets and ante, Katie was getting a net gain of forty-nine pounds of prime quality lean mass. Her muscles started expanding, swelling like

balloons, first regaining their lost firmness, and from there growing more and more, increasing their definition and volume in the process.

She arched her back and rolled her wide shoulders, making her large fake breasts push up, more and more, rising over the swelling shelf of her engorged pecs. The elasticity of her bikini top was put to the test, and for a moment it looked it was about to snap. She then stretched her arms opening and closing her hands into fists as her forearms swelled before flexing her brand-new cantaloupe-sized bicep.

“Oh yeah, baby! The Queen is back!” Katie gloated as she flexed her arms making her biceps swell even bigger, all the sag and weakness was gone. Her pupils were blown wide, and her blonde hair tousled like she’d just stepped off a wind-swept set.

Then she stopped, and made a strange face, like she’d just caught an unexpected aftertaste.

“Damn! How much are you juicing these days, girlie?” She asked Aleksandra, arching a brow. “Not that I’m complaining, but I’m surprised you still have a liver left, babe! She said as she performed a quick side chest pose, letting out a delighted, mocking laughter.

Aleksandra said nothing. Her face remained stony, unreadable. This wasn’t the moment to show irritation. No, she would bide her time, the night was still young. And eventually, Katie wouldn’t be laughing quite so much.

HAND 3

“Ante up, ladies.”, said Madame X, while giving Ruth a meaningful look, her gaze lingered on her a couple of agonizingly long seconds before shifting to the rest of the players. Ruth squirmed a bit, uncomfortable with her hostess’ attention, and placed a copper chip in the center of the table, followed by the others

With a self-satisfied smile on her face, Madame X shuffled the deck one last time and dealt the five other women.

Aleksandra took a deep breath before looking at her cards. Her losses had been more severe than she had anticipated, specially this early in the game. She

needed a good hand, and quick. The sight hit her like a bucket of cold water. She had a High Card again, Seven of Clubs, Two of Hearts, Nine of Diamonds, Four of Spades, Jack of Clubs.

It was a particularly weak hand, and short of changing all her cards, she saw no way out of this. But doing so would need her to risk copper chips she couldn't afford to lose. She grimaced, frustrated, a gesture she knew other players could notice. Not that it mattered, she had already decided to sit this one out.

"I raise one silver.", Ruth said as she pushed the bright grey chip to the center of the table.

There was a sudden commotion around her, the rest of the players looked in surprise at the silver chip, shining among the copper ones.

Aleksandra quickly understood her reasons. Like her, Ruth couldn't afford to bet more copper chips, but given her superior height, she could afford to lose her silver ones. This willingness to take risks gave her, for the moment, a significant advantage over the other players.

"I call it.", said Chloe Ann, pushing five copper chips. There was a hastiness in the brat's tone, that made Aleksandra think she would never back down from betting, even if with bad cards and nonexistent bluffs.

"I fold.", Aleksandra said, leaving her cards face down into the muck. She couldn't help the tone of defeat in her voice, which Katie noticed from the slight chuckle she let out.

"I call it!", Katie said in her breathy voice, adding another five copper chips to the pot. Aleksandra noticed how her lips trembled slightly, already excited with the prospect of becoming even taller. The unpleasant thought of a giantess Katie, overwhelming the world with her enormous fake tits, intruded into her mind to the point of making her wince.

"I call it.", Linda declared, betraying no emotion, as she added her copper chips to the pile.

"Draw round, dears.", said Madame X with a pearly smile.

Aleksandra took a few moments to observe her rivals, one of the few advantages

of being out of the game. Ruth traded two cards, with a confident gesture, Chloe Ann kept hers, maybe out of stubbornness, Katie traded two and Linda only one.

Armed with their new cards, the remaining players entered the second round of betting.

“I bet one silver.”, Ruth pushed a second shinning chip into the pot. That took Aleksandra by surprise, and surely the others too, but really if anyone could afford to lose inches of height it was her.

“I call it ... and raise five copper more!”, Chloe Ann said, pushing ten copper chips towards the pot with a bratty grin.

Aleksandra studied the subtle expressions that crossed Ruth’s face in just a few seconds, shock followed by panic and finally covered by determination. “I call it.”, she said, pushing one more silver chip to the center of the table.

“I call it.”, said Katie, puckering her lips smugly.

“I call it.”, Linda declared. Although her voice remained flat and emotionless, Aleksandra noticed the way she stared at Ruth’s silver chips, crowning a pile of fifty copper ones. After so many years participating in this game, it was easy to know what each player was looking for. Most just wanted more muscle, obviously. The more experienced ones, like Katie and herself, looked for keeping their youth or even turning back the clock a couple of years. And the short ones like Linda always wanted to be taller.

“Let us see those cards, dears.”, Madame X said with a sly smile.

Ruth put her cards face up on the table, Eight of Hearts, Eight of Clubs, Eight of Diamonds, Six of Spades, Three of Diamonds. A Three of a Kind, not a particularly bad hand, but Aleksandra wasn’t sure it was worth betting three silver chips.

Chloe Ann sighed once more as she placed her cards, Ten of Hearts, Ten of Clubs, Five of Spades, Five of Hearts, Queen of Diamonds, a weak Two Pair, already beaten by Ruth’s hand.

Katie showed her cards with a sour face, Jack of Spades, Jack of Hearts, Nine of Hearts, Nine of Spades, Six of Clubs. A Two Pair, stronger than Chloe Ann’s but

still weaker than Ruth’s.

Aleksandra watched intently as Linda laid her cards on the table, maybe Ruth’s risky bet would pay off after all.

King of Diamonds, King of Clubs, King of Spades, Four of Hearts, Seven of Diamonds, another Three of a Kind, and the strongest hand at the table. Aleksandra was quick enough to catch a glimpse of Ruth’s pained expression, before she forced her face into a facade of stoic resignation.

A shimmer washed over the pile of copper chips again, making the silver ones so bright that looking at them hurt the eyes.

Ruth didn’t even flinch this time. She just exhaled slowly through her nose, as if she’d already made peace with her body’s transformation. Her frame only seemed to shrink a bit, so Aleksandra guessed that most of her height loss would come from the shortening of her legs. Her broad shoulders narrowed slightly, and the thick muscles of her arms and torso seemed to melt into a more streamlined form. Her face shifted too, becoming rounder as her jawline softened. Her forehead veins and expression lines faded, leaving behind a smoother, younger-looking version of herself. Aleksandra had to admit that she looked way prettier now.

Chloe Ann gasped, as a sudden tightness gripped her limbs. Her thick arms slackened, biceps shrinking under the strain, and her pumpkin-sized deltoids lost their carved shape. Muscle slid away like air from a tire, her striations smoothening out. A panicked grunt escaped her, followed by a sharp, “Shit!” Her chest rose and fell with shallow, rapid breaths as her frame shrank. “No, no, no...” she whined, her voice noticeably higher now, cracking as she cursed again under her breath. She looked down at her less-defined body, stunned, blinking hard against the discomfort and disbelief.

Aleksandra studied the brat’s diminished body, which was becoming less extraordinary with each lost hand.

She could still retire now, and walk away with the remaining muscle mass she had gained by pure luck, but that was unlikely to happen. She was definitely dumber than a rock.

Aleksandra felt a sudden, fleeting pang of pain as one pound of muscle left her

body, nothing compared to the agonizing losses she had experienced before. She took a deep breath and turned her gaze toward Katie, just as it was her turn to pay her debts, ready to enjoy the spectacle.

Katie noticed this and gave her back a look full of hate, just before pain made her wince and bare her teeth. Her broad, sculpted arms slackened slightly, and her once-firm deltoids began to sink, just like Chloe Ann's a moment before. Her torso followed, the tightness in her frame giving way to a softer, sagging look, like the air had been let out of her post-workout pump. She was still big, still imposing, but gravity had begun to win. Katie blinked, adjusted her posture, and pulled her shoulders back with practiced vanity, but the firmness was gone. She looked down at herself with a faint grimace of bitterness.

All this time Linda had been sitting perfectly still, watching her rivals dwindle, her stony face betraying no emotion. When Katie's muscles stopped shrinking, she simply looked in Madam X's direction, as if asking permission to collect her winnings. Their hostess nodded graciously, a smile on her red lips, and Linda picked up her chips with a fluid movement.

Linda adjusted her glasses and folded her hands neatly on the table, just as her newly acquired chips began to shimmer. In a moment a slow, pressure ran through her bones, lengthening her spine just enough for her head to rise above its usual level.

Her bikini top stretched as her already powerful frame thickened, deltoids rounding out, biceps swelling, and her chest expanding with visible force. She quickly regained the outstanding conditioning she had at the start of the game, and from there she continued to expand more and more. Aleksandra watched the process unfold with awed envy. Linda looked down at her growing arms and smiled, pleased. Her face sharpened, her jaw grew wider, and her cheekbones became even more defined, giving her a fiercer, commanding look. Although she kept her posture composed, a quiet sigh escaped her lips as she drew in a slow, full breath, her now massive torso pushing forward with pride.

Just as Madame X began to pick up the cards and shuffle them, Ruth leaned forward slightly and spoke to her, in a voice much softer than she used to have. "Madame X, I would like to leave this game now, please. I do not wish to keep playing any longer."

Madame X gave her a knowing smile, serene and unbothered.

“Of course, dear. Sometimes discretion is the better part of valor.”, Madame X said with a wide smile.

“But you know well there is a penalty for quitting this game.” Her gaze sharpened for an instant. “I must take ten of your copper chips, or an equivalent value in silver or gold.”

Ruth nodded, resigned.

With unhurried grace, Madame X stretched out her massive arm, her long pale fingers hovering over Ruth’s modest pile of chips.

“I’ll be taking this one, dear.”, she said, carefully plucking a single golden chip between her fingers. It shimmered for an instant, then dissolved in a crackle of soft blue sparks.

Aleksandra didn’t notice any significant change in Ruth after losing the year of life that her lost gold chip represented. It could have been an illusion of the room’s lighting, but Ruth now seemed more mature and focused.

“I release you, dear.”, Madame X said, raising her hand in a gesture of benediction. “By the Oath of Hecate, you are free to go.” The moment the words left her lips, a sudden gust of cold wind swept through the room, despite the sealed windows. Linda’s remaining chips burst like soap bubbles, leaving a small cloud of blue sparkles that flew towards her body like drunken bees.

“I hope to see you next year, dear.”, she said to Ruth with a gracious nod, her expression as unreadable as ever.

Ruth nodded back, stood, and walked towards the door. Aleksandra tilted her head slightly, watching her go with a flicker of detached amusement. It wouldn’t surprise her to see the her collecting bodybuilding trophies pretty soon. Her new compact form moved much more gracefully now, and all her symmetry issues were gone. Her torso tapered out from her waist, giving her an amazing V shape, in balance with her still wide shoulders. An alluring femininity that had been hidden underneath her larger, bulkier shape had emerged, like a rough diamond cut to perfection. The judges were going to go crazy about her.

HAND 4

Madame X continued shuffling her cards until Ruth left the room and the door closed behind her. “Ante up, ladies.”, she said with a cryptic smile.

Once the copper chips were at the center of the table, she dealt their cards to her four remaining players.

Aleksandra took a deep breath before looking at her cards, she needed them to be outstanding, or she was done.

Her jaw clenched shut tight and her nostrils flared at the sight. Ten of Diamonds, Ten of Spades, Jack of Hearts, Seven of Clubs, Three of Diamonds. A Pair with, two weak kickers. She found bitter consolation in the fact that at least it wasn’t a High Card again.

She quickly scanned the rest of the players, looking for clues to develop her strategy, back came guarded and distrustful glances. Ruth’s early withdrawal had left a tense atmosphere at the table, especially evident among the veteran players, Katie and herself. This wasn’t going to be a game like the others, there was something frantic and fierce in the air tonight.

With Ruth gone, it was now up to Chloe Ann to make the first bet, or fold.

She bounced slightly in her seat, her bright purple-pink pigtails swaying with each movement. “I raise ten.”, she said at last hastily, biting her plump lower lip.

It was like she had a neon sign floating over her head saying “I got a garbage hand.” Aleksandra almost felt sorry for the brat. Almost. She decided to bluff, betting aggressively to project strength, with the hopes of improving her hand soon.

The only obstacle to her strategy was the measly seven copper chips she had left. It was time to take a risk, she took one of her gold chips and put it in the pot. “I call it.”, she said with all the confidence she was capable of.

“I call it!”, Katie said almost immediately, her eyes sparkling at the shine of the gold chip, as she pushed ten copper chips to the pot.

“I call it.”, said Linda cooly, making the same bet.

“Draw round, dears.”, said Madame X, clearly pleased to see her players making large bets right from the start.

Aleksandra decided to discard her two weakest cards, Seven of Clubs and Three of Diamonds. Her heart skipped a beat when she saw the cards that had replaced those, Five of Clubs and Five of Diamonds, making her hand a Two Pair. She saw Chloe Ann trade three cards, obviously desperate to improve her hand, while Katie and Linda traded two.

“I raise ten.”, said Chloe Ann, in a tone that Aleksandra realized was trying to imitate her own in her previous bluff, poor thing.

However, this left Aleksandra with no choice but to keep up, so she grabbed another of her gold chips and put it in the pot. “I call it.”

“I raise twenty.”, said Katie, who until then had been watching them with practiced poise, her red nails tapping lightly on the table and her lips pursed in a glossy pout.

“I call it!”, Chloe Ann almost yelled, throwing another ten copper chips on the pot.

Aleksandra felt her stomach drop, and her mind aflame with panic. This had gotten out of hand, that Botox bitch would stop at nothing to get her gold chips.

“I call it.”, she muttered under her breath, placing another gold chip on the table. Katie almost drooled at the sight.

“I fold.”, said Linda, pushing her cards face down on the muck.

Aleksandra felt a sudden relief, at least the stakes wouldn’t be raised any further.

“Let us see those cards, dears.”, said Madame X playfully scrunching her nose, indifferent to the tension at the table.

Chloe Ann placed her cards with another frustrated sigh, Queen of Clubs, Queen of Hearts, Seven of Diamonds, Three of Spades, Six of Hearts, just a mere Pair. Aleksandra could hardly believe that someone could be so reckless.

Aleksandra’s mouth felt dry as she placed her Two pair on the table, a hand that

could either made her or break her. She heard a pained gasp coming from Chloe, but another frustrated one, from Katie.

The aging bimbo laid her cards on the table, with a slap full of annoyance. Ten of Hearts, Ten of Clubs, Jack of Spades, Five of Spades, Five of Hearts. A Two Pair with the same value as Aleksandra's, an almost impossible coincidence which meant a tie between the two.

Even Madame X seemed surprised by this outcome. "Split pot!", she exclaimed in her rich, deep contralto voice. "How delightful!"

The pile of chips began shimmering, but their glow was weaker than on previous occasions. Aleksandra noticed that almost half of the copper chips and her three gold ones remained unchanged.

Chloe Ann groaned as her body started collapsing into itself, her bodybuilding prodigy physique narrowing into something much more ordinary. Definition faded from her arms and torso, her once-powerful build settling into a bulky, vaguely athletic shape.

She looked like she had been at the beginning of the game, but no longer cocky, but exhausted and sore. Aleksandra noticed that she had squandered all the copper chips she had earned with a single stroke of dumb luck save one. She was back at her initial reserves of 40 copper chips, which knowing her, wouldn't last her for long.

She looked puffier and plump, as if she were retaining water. "Oh, come on!", she groaned, her voice high and strained. She flexed her arm with a faint hope, and poked at her soft, diminished bicep, frowning deeply. "This sucks!", she muttered, pouting hard, fists clenched at her sides as if seconds from slamming the table.

Linda sat perfectly still awaiting her own change, with an attitude that couldn't be more opposite to Chloe Ann's. There was only the barest flicker of movement across her chest, her pecs tightened momentarily, and slowly began to flatten, followed by her arms, the fullness of her biceps and shoulders easing back, shedding mass with quiet precision. Her posture never shifted as eleven pounds of lean muscle were extracted from her frame. This loss in volume along with the height she had gained earlier gave her a leaner, almost predatory build.

Since Aleksandra and Katie hands had the same value, the pot will have to be divided under the arbitration of their hostess and dealer, Madame X.

The raven-haired woman, massive and unreadable, reached for the chips. She returned each player the amount they had bet, 31 copper chips to Katie, and to Aleksandra, three gold chips and a single copper chip. As the polished gold clinked softly against Aleksandra's stack, she noticed Katie's eyes fixed on them with a sharp, frustrated hunger.

Madame X then took the remainder 42 copper chips of the pot and with quiet precision, split it evenly in two stacks of 21 chips, one to each winner.

Both players reached out to take their winnings, but Aleksandra had to force her hands to keep it from shaking. This was her first win in a year, after a night of experiencing nothing but losses. The moment her stack copper chips began to shimmer almost brought tears to her eyes. She felt her muscles twitch with anticipation, hungry and alert. Fuck, how she had missed this.

Aleksandra straightened slightly in her seat as it began. Her breath caught, not from pain, but from something deeper, almost euphoric. Her muscles swelled gradually, like rising bread under heat, strength returning to her frame in steady, measured waves. Her arms thickened, her back broadened, and her posture lifted with growing force. Twenty-one pounds of solid mass returned to her body, not enough to restore her former power, but enough to feel real again. Her skin flushed with warmth, and her strong fingers curled slightly against the table as a quiet exhale slipped from her lips, halfway a laugh and a moan.

But then her eyes flicked to Katie, and her mood cooled. She wasn't alone in this moment of rebirth, but had to share it instead with someone she deeply loathed. Her first victory of the night had left her with a bitter taste of ashes, and she only hoped to soon be able to enjoy one that was hers and hers alone.

Katie's lips parted in a soft, breathy moan as the strength returned to her body. Her muscles re-tightened with slow, deliberate force. Deltoids rounded, arms thickened, and her chest rose with renewed firmness, pushing her large fake breasts up once more. The sag from earlier was gone, replaced by a taut, powerful build that surpassed even what she'd had before. She flexed proudly, and her smile widened into something wicked.

She tilted her head, tossed her long blonde hair back with dramatic flair, and let

her mascara-laden eyes drift toward Aleksandra. The smugness oozed out of her person like an even more pungent and tackier perfume. She shifted in her seat like a queen settling into her throne, pleased by how far ahead she was now.

HAND 5

“Ante up, ladies.”, said Madame X, giving Chloe Ann a playful look, with a hint of mockery on her ruby red lips.

With the four copper chips on the pot, she slid the cards across the table, landing neatly in front of each player.

Aleksandra felt much more confident now after narrowly avoiding disaster, and promised herself, as she picked up the cards in front of her to be more cautious in the future. The bad hand of cards that appeared before her eyes immediately invited her to honor her word, Eight of Hearts, Four of Spades, Two of Diamonds, Queen of Clubs and Six of Hearts, a mere High Card. She would had to sit this one out, to avoid repeating Chloe’s clumsy rookie mistakes.

“I raise ten.”, declared the brat, apparently unaware that her chip reserves could no longer keep up with her recklessness.

“I fold.”, said Aleksandra, pushing her cards face down in the muck.

“Again, girlie?” Katie cackled maliciously. “Have you come here to play or just to gobble up the snack cart?”

Aleksandra felt her cheeks burning with anger, and held her gaze. For a tense moment the two stared into each other’s eyes, until a polite cough was heard from across the table, coming from Madame X. Katie lost all of her bluster then and quickly went to rummage through her pile of chips. “I raise twenty!” She said pushing the chips and smiling servilely at their now serious hostess.

“I call it!”, Chloe Ann replied defiantly, putting another ten copper chips ahead.

“I call it.”, Linda said drily as she placed her chips.

“Draw round, dears.”, said Madame X, now looking less cheerful than usual.

Of all the players, only Katie traded cards this time. Madame X glared at her as

she gave her two new cards, clearly displeased by her faux pas, which made the tacky bimbo squirm in her seat.

“I raise ten.”, said Chloe Ann aggressively, almost slamming her chips on the table, leaving just ten behind. Aleksandra, again a passive observer, could see how her obsession to win again, combined with her lack of self-control, were diminishing the brat’s already poor playing skills.

“I call it.”, replied Katie, full of arrogant confidence, pushing her copper chips ahead.

“I raise twenty.”, Linda said matter-of-factly, as she dropped her chips on the pile.

A deathly silence fell over the table, and the fiery tempers of the two women went out like embers.

Aleksandra perked up on her seat, watching in amazement at this unexpected development of the game. Up until now, Linda had proven to be a cautious player, but with this bet, her copper chip reserves could be nearly exhausted. Her hand must have been extremely powerful for her to take this risk, or perhaps she was resorting to a bluffing ability she hadn’t need to use until now.

“I... I call it.”, Chloe Ann managed to mumble, as she pushed all her remaining copper chips to the pot.

Aleksandra briefly considered why she didn’t use her still-intact reserves of silver and gold chips, but it was obvious she wasn’t thinking clearly enough to consider that option. Maybe that was for the better.

“I fold.”, Katie hissed between her teeth, dropping her cards face down in the muck. Her sour grimace managed to bring a smile to Aleksandra’s face.

“Let us see those cards, dears.”, said Madame X smiling once again.

The pile of chips at the pot was the largest gathered tonight so far, a mouth-watering amount of one hundred and fourteen thick metal circles. Even the players who had folded couldn’t help but stare at that treasure with covetousness.

Chloe Ann laid her cards on the table, staring defiantly at Linda. Seven of Hearts, Seven of Spades, Seven of Diamonds, Three of Clubs and Six of Clubs. A sort of weak Three of a Kind, too little to put so much faith in it.

Aleksandra noticed a cruel smile flicker on Linda's thin lips as she laid her own cards on the table. Ten of Diamonds, Ten of Clubs, Ten of Spades, Four of Hearts and Four of Clubs, a Full House.

Chloe Ann couldn't help but let out a pitiful "No!" as the pile of chips began shimmering. All eyes turned to her, awaiting to witness her incoming transformation.

Her body started to sag inward, collapsing in slow motion like a poorly made soufflé. Her shoulders slumped forward as if weighed down by invisible chains, and what little muscle remained seemed to vanish under her skin. She no longer looked athletic at all, not even average, but feeble, soft, and tired. Her limbs hung limply, pale and pasty, and even her chin looked weaker. She winced, then glanced down at herself with wide, trembling eyes. "No, no, no...", she murmured, voice cracking into a nasal whine.

There was a hollowness to her cheeks, that made her look older than her real age. Her skin, once glowing and tan, had taken on a pale tone and a dry, papery texture, as though its collagen had been drained from it.

Her purple-pink hair, once full of bounce, now hung limp in its pigtails, brittle like party ribbon left out in the sun.

Her lip trembled. She looked one breath away from bursting into tears.

Watching Chloe Ann's downfall, Aleksandra appreciated the foresight of the rule excluding all non-heavyweight bodybuilders from the game, while also increasing her puzzlement at how Madame X had let her participate anyway.

Aleksandra then felt a quick, stabbing pain as the one pound of muscle she had put up as ante was extracted from her. By then, she was almost accustomed to it.

To her left, she heard Katie's pained grunts. A quick glance confirmed what she suspected, she had nearly reverted to her original shape at the start of the game, a middle-aged, off-season, past-her-prime bimbo bodybuilder.

Katie looked furious at her diminished physique, her face twisted into a sour scowl, an almost comical mix of vanity and disbelief. Aleksandra watched with a flicker of malicious curiosity, wondering if that night might finally be the one when she got rid of her for good.

“Well dear, it seems like our paths part here.”, said Madame X looking piercingly at the diminished brat, while raising her hand. “I shall release you now.”

“No! Wait! Please wait! I ... I still have those left!”, Chloe Ann pleaded pathetically, pointing at her gold and silver chips with a trembling hand.

“That is not possible, dear.”, said Madame X, with all the compassion someone like her could be capable of mustering. “Remember the rules of the game, without copper chips, you cannot play.”

Chloe Ann didn’t reply, but lowered her head, utterly defeated, with her chin sunk on her chest.

Madame X gave her a look between pity and disdain, and raised her hand once more. “By the Oath of Hecate, you are free to go.” A light breeze of cold air swept across the room. Chloe Ann’s remaining chips burst and turned into blue sparks, which sank into her diminished body.

Chloe Ann didn’t move from her spot for a few seconds afterwards, and just kept staring down. “You’re done here, you may leave.”, Madame X then told her in a stern voice, and the dwindled brat rose laboriously from her chair, propping herself with her trembling, flabby arms.

Aleksandra watched her shuffle away from the table, slowly dragging her feet, exhausted just by the mere movement, her body a textbook definition of skinny-fat. She looked shorter, even if she hadn’t lost any silver chips. Her shoulders slouched forward, with very little muscle left to support her posture. She clutched awkwardly the sides of her bikini bottom with her hands, trying to keep the loose fabric from slipping down. Her once celebrated Brazilian booty had vanished, with the powerful swell of her glutes reduced to two flat lumps of flesh, sagging sadly. Her once mighty thighs and calves were gone too, transformed into fragile twig-like legs, trembling with each step.

Aleksandra wondered what would become of her in the future. Based on her

experience with the effects of the game, her metabolism and ability to gain muscle would be now severely impaired. Perhaps with enough exercise and proper nutrition, she may get some of her fitness back, but most likely she would remain a pushover for the rest of her life. Her days of social media stardom were over.

It wasn’t until Chloe Ann left the room and the door closed behind her that Madame X nodded to Linda, giving her permission to claim her winnings. The mature Asian woman had remained all this time sitting impassively in her chair, displaying a self-control that amazed Aleksandra and that had evidently won the approval of her hostess.

Linda stretched out her brawny arms, circled the enormous pile of chips, which shimmered like a mirage, and pushed them towards her.

She started to grow at once and with staggering force. Muscle piled onto her frame like wet clay slapped onto a sculpture, her arms thickening in real time, delts rounding out into cannonballs, her chest surging forward with dense, powerful mass. Seventy-three pounds of solid muscle poured into her compact 5'4" frame, pushing her body to its limit. She looked like she might pop, every inch of her rippling and swollen with strength. The straps of her bikini tightened like guitar strings, digging deep into her skin, but she was too engrossed with her change to notice or care.

Although she hadn’t gained any gold chips, it was clear that a substantial part of Chloe Ann’s youthful vitality had entered her body, mixed into the torrent of muscle mass. Her skin glowed now, with a vibrant, healthy flush. A few stray grays near her temples darkened into rich black again, and the creases near her eyes and mouth smoothed ever so slightly.

She let out a low chuckle, her voice now deeper than before, and ran her hands across her overstuffed pecs and arms, fingers tracing each impossibly full contour with reverent delight. Her range of motion had narrowed slightly, joints pressed by swelling size, but she adjusted without complaint. If anything, the restriction seemed to please her, a sign of just how massive she had come.

She was beyond impressive now, not just by female bodybuilding standards, but by any measure. She looked like she could step onto the stage at a men’s heavyweight competition and win.

HAND 6

With Chloe Ann out of the game, the atmosphere around them shifted. The table felt calmer, but underneath something ravenous lurked.

“Ante up, ladies.”, said Madame X, her smile calm and unbothered, as if amused by the rising tension around her.

Three poker chips landed on the pot, and five rectangles of perfect darkness did the same in front of each player.

Aleksandra looked at her cards, and her heart almost skipped a beat at the sight. Seven of Clubs, Eight of Hearts, Nine of Diamonds, Ten of Spades and Jack of Hearts, a Straight. A promising hand she decided to keep on the spot.

With Ruth and Chloe Ann gone, she was the one to begin the betting round, so she tried to start slow.

“I raise five.”, she said while putting the chips on the pot.

“Ha! I raise ten!” Katie scoffed as she made her bet.

“I call it.”, Linda said, savoring her new deeper voice. Aleksandra noticed then a very subtle change in her attitude. She had left behind her uptight manners and now almost wiggled in her chair.

“Draw round, dears.”, said Madame X.

Aleksandra, satisfied with her hand, did not change any cards, and watched Katie and Linda instead as they each one traded two.

Katie was almost back to square one, all her victories had been short-lived, without demonstrating a clear game strategy. Aleksandra had to admit to herself that Katie probably felt the same way about her, not without some reason.

However, Linda had proven to be a formidable player. She had acted intelligently, folding or betting heavily at the opportune moments. At that instant she knew that whatever happened to herself or Katie, she would be the final rival to beat.

“I raise five.”, Aleksandra said, determined to keep her bets low so as not to give her rivals any clues.

“Again? You are playing with the big girls now, babe! Act like it!” Katie said, emphasizing her words by flexing her right arm, then throwing her chips into the pot, contemptuously. “I raise ten!”

“I call it.”, Aleksandra replied, trying to keep the annoyance in her voice in check.

“I call it.”, Linda purred, which took Aleksandra by surprise. Whatever had entered her body along with Chloe Ann’s muscle mass had soaked her in sensuality. At that moment she noticed something on Linda’s otherwise calm face, a tell. A faint tremor washed over her right eyebrow for just a second. Finally, a gap in her armor.

“Let us see those cards, dears.”, said Madame X.

Aleksandra saw Katie and Linda frown at once, as she laid her cards on the table. She couldn’t help but smile as they revealed their hands, both Three of a Kind. Katie had Five of Hearts, Five of Diamonds, Five of Clubs, Nine of Spades and King of Diamonds, a decent hand, in other circumstances. Linda’s hand surprised her for its relative weakness, Eight of Clubs, Eight of Spades, Eight of Diamonds, Four of Diamonds and Six of Spades. Perhaps she had picked up some of Chloe Ann’s foolishness after all, Aleksandra thought to herself with amusement. She was now convinced that her eyebrow’s tremor betrayed lack of confidence in her current hand.

A familiar shimmer washed over the pile of sixty-three copper chips, and Aleksandra prepared herself to enjoy watching her rivals squirm and shrink.

Katie let out a sharp, indignant gasp as the tremor ran through her body. Her form didn’t exactly shrink, but the power beneath her skin seemed to evaporate. Her muscles retained their size, but not their firmness. Aleksandra watched with satisfaction as Katie’s once-impressive biceps sagged and softened, deflating like overripe fruit. Her arms now jiggled with every twitch, thick but spongy.

Her skin took on a slick, greasy sheen, as sweat clung to her. Wrinkles deepened around her mouth and eyes, and the slight droop in her cheeks gave her the uncanny look of a wax figure starting to melt under hot lights. Her lips curled

into a tight, furious sneer, and her eyes darted toward Aleksandra, burning with resentment. Just moments ago, she had been untouchable, a towering muscle goddess. Now, she looked bloated and worn. She sat stiffly, jaw clenched, trying to hold onto whatever dignity she still had.

Linda exhaled through her nose, calm and steady, as her enormous frame began to subtly deflate. Twenty-one pounds of solid muscle mass melted away with controlled precision. Even as the the swollen tightness in her arms and chest eased, her body retained its imposing appearance. She rolled her shoulders, testing the renewed space in her joints, and gave a thoughtful little poke to her upper arm, inspecting her flesh's loss of density. She pouted briefly, a gesture that felt oddly out of place on a woman so stoic and disciplined. At that moment, she lifted her head and looked Aleksandra straight in the eyes, with the faintest smile on her lips, and a cold gaze that sent shivers down her spine. Aleksandra felt for a moment that her opponent was measuring her, that somehow her victory had already been factored and allowed as part of a larger strategy. This was a timely reminder not to underestimate Linda, no matter how much of Chloe Ann had become imbued into her.

Aleksandra turned her face away so as not to reveal her discomfort, she wouldn't let Linda spoil her moment of triumph with her mind games. Her gaze then met Madame X's, who nodded pleased, likely interpreting it as Aleksandra's request for permission to collect her winnings. Aleksandra was inwardly grateful for this misunderstanding as she placed her hands around the pile of chips, trying with all her might not to show her eagerness to drag all of them to herself. She basked on the glow emanating from the pile of chips, ready to be transformed.

The change came on like a rising tide, and she let it take her. A deliriously pleasant warmth coursed across her body. Muscle layered onto her frame with slow, unrelenting force, like an invisible hand was sculpting her inch by inch. Her traps rose like cliffs beneath her neck, her arms expanded and her pecs thickened and swelled forward with such pressure they made the straps of her bikini groan. Her lats widened and her thighs pressed apart under the weight of newfound power.

At 244 pounds, she was 16 pounds shy of her last year's physique, when she stood four inches taller. However, her shorter stature enhanced her gains, turning her into compact, blocky slab of hard muscle. Like Linda, she could now step into a male bodybuilding contest and walk away with the winning trophy.

Her hands, thick and veiny, moved up over her torso, over pecs so firm they didn't even give under her grip, over abs cut into her like armor plates. Her head tilted back and a long slow sigh escaped her throat, turning into a guttural moan of pleasure.

Her eyes fluttered shut. In this instant, she felt like the world had narrowed down to her breath and her body, the thrum of blood and the weight of her expanding flesh. This was the thing she lived for. And best of all, it was hers, and hers alone. How bland and unsatisfying the growth she had been forced to share with Katie felt compared to this moment of bliss.

But paradoxically, Katie was there anyway, although her presence wasn't at all odious this time, but quite the opposite. As she completely absorbed the contents of all the chips in the pot, Aleksandra experienced the flavors of their respective donors. A shifting kaleidoscope of bulging muscles contracting and relaxing, being torn apart and rebuilt, getting bigger and stronger, over an over again.

Katie's flavor was the first one she registered. It was syrupy, thick and borderline trashy, but irresistibly fun in a guilty-pleasure kind of way. All the chemicals she had pumped into herself to enhance her physique over the years had turned her into the juiciest junk food imaginable.

Linda's flavor was next, and Aleksandra almost ran out of breath as she tasted it, overwhelmed by its sheer intensity. This was like nothing she had ever experienced before, layered and commanding, a slow-burner achieved through years and years of single-minded dedication. Most shocking of all, it had no traces of steroids, other than those left by Linda's successive winnings tonight. It was all natural, built on a foundation of extraordinary genetics, rigorous nutrition and strenuous exercise. She finally understood Chloe Ann's reckless style of play, this being her first experience absorbing another player's muscles. Savoring this delicacy invited obsession. Now more than ever, Aleksandra craved every last chip from Linda, regardless of its metal.

Speaking of the Chloe Ann, her flavor was the next one she detected, diluted within the previous ones, but still present. After the stunning experience with Linda's, it was certainly a welcome break. It felt bouncy, youthful, cheeky, and incredibly refreshing. A much less cloying and artificial counterpart to Katie's that dispelled any of her previous doubts about the brat's presence at the game.

Ruth’s taste was the las one she perceived, almost an echo at this point of the game. Aleksandra, however, could feel its solidity and the rigor with which her previous owner had developed her muscles, resembling in that aspect to Linda. Her regular use of steroids brought her closer to Katie and Chloe Ann, although more to the latter due to her age. Sampling such well-rounded muscle quality made Aleksandra wish Ruth had stayed a bit longer in the game.

As Aleksandra’s high wore off, the world around her snapped back into focus. Although she had felt suspended in a timeless limbo during her transformation, only a few seconds had passed. This distortion in time perception that came with winning never ceased to amaze her.

She looked at her hostess and fellow players, who stared back at her. Katie regarded her with venomous resentment, Linda with eerie coldness, and Madame X with proud approval.

HAND 7

“Ante up, ladies.” Said Madame X, glancing sideways at Katie and her dwindling pile of chips, with an indecipherable expression on her flawless face.

Chips clinked into the pot. A moment later, the cards slid out in perfect rhythm, settling in front of each player.

Aleksandra glanced at hers. Three of a Kind, Six of Diamonds, Six of Hearts, Six of Clubs, Eight of Spades and Jack of Hearts. A solid hand. She hid her satisfaction behind a lazy smile and pushed forward 10 copper chips, letting her eyes linger on Katie with quiet malice. Katie had bled chips in the last round, and now Aleksandra was twisting the knife.

“I raise ten.”, she said, giving Katie a quick mocking smile

“I call it.” The aging bimbo said, meeting her gaze with a glare. She had stacked her remaining chips into a narrow tower, and kept shuffling them, with a mechanical, restless motion. One chip lifted, placed on top, then again, and again.

“I raise fifteen”, said Linda, barely looking at her chips a she dropped them on the pot. She had accrued the largest pile on the table, and seemed willing to indulge in a little splurging.

To Aleksandra, Linda looked like a cat toying with its prey, relaxed, and completely in control. Her little tremor, her one weakness, was nowhere to be found.

“I call it.”, said at Aleksandra and Katie at once.

“Draw round, dears.”, said Madame X.

Aleksandra decided to keep all her cards. Katie traded two, and Linda kept all of hers as well. At this point Linda’s confidence in her hand was beyond question, it only remained to be seen how strong it actually was.

“I raise ten.”, Aleksandra said, allowing herself to be a bit bolder this time.

“I raise three silver.”, Katie said, her overtly plump somehow pursed in a straight line, as she pushed her silver chips into the pot. A risky move, but not completely unexpected, since she has only 10 copper left, and could afford to lose some of the height she had gained from Aleksandra last year. She also had all her 5 gold chips but it would be a cold day in Hell before she bet those.

“I call it.”, replied Aleksandra adding 5 copper chips to her bet.

“I raise thirty-five”, said Linda, raising the stakes again, as she pushed a small fortune in muscle into the pot with casual ease.

"I fold.”, Aleksandra said with a sigh, sliding her cards into the muck. Linda’s brow was still, this was the real deal. It was better to leave now and lose a little than to persist and suffer even more.

Katie hesitated. For a heartbeat, it looked like she would fold too, teeth sinking into her lower lip, eyes darting. Then she did the unthinkable.

“I call it with two gold.” She almost snarled, throwing the golden discs of metal on the pot.

Aleksandra blinked in disbelief. “Snowing in Hell.”, she thought.

“Let us see those cards, dears.”, said Madame X.

Katie turned over her cards, Three of a Kind, Seven of Clubs, Seven of Hearts,

Seven of Spades, Queen of Diamonds and Ace of Clubs. Strong, but not enough.

Linda had Two of Diamonds, Five of Diamonds, Eight of Diamonds, Nine of Diamonds and Jack of Diamonds, a Flush.

As the cards hit the table, Katie let out a flat, detached “Fuck.”

Aleksandra caught the glance from Madame X, heavy-lidded, lips tightening in a crimson line of distaste. Their hostess had no patience for vulgarity nor sore losers.

With 98 copper chips, this pot was one of the largest tonight, but it was the silver and gold chips that made its shimmer almost blinding.

Aleksandra gripped the edge of the table tightly with her hands, and closed her eyes even tighter, preparing for what was coming.

The extraction of the 31 pounds of muscle that represented her lost copper chips felt like being torn apart. Aleksandra gritted her teeth and closed her eyes so tightly that she saw stars, bursting into supernovas of pain.

When she opened her eyes again, nauseated and exhausted, she realized that she had thrown her head back and was now looking up at the ceiling, her neck craned in an odd angle.

It seemed to her, still shrouded in a haze of pain and weakness, that the deities painted inside the darkened dome were mocking her. They would have no shortage of reasons to do so. After so many ups, downs, and moments of uncertainty, her copper chip count was now 38, practically a return to her initial reserves.

“Motherfucker! Goddammit!” Katie’s hoarse voice growled at her side, full of fury and indignation. With an effort that seemed almost superhuman, Aleksandra ordered her battered muscles to raise her head and look at her rival. The sight was shocking.

Katie’s body had collapsed inward both in height and volume. Sixteen pounds of lean mass had vanished from her frame, along with fifteen more in softer tissue along with their three inches of height. She sagged in every direction, finally defeated by gravity, like a crumbling mountain.

The remains of her once-chiseled torso and proud V-taper had collapsed into a softer, almost pear-shaped silhouette, while her arms wobbled with each movement like large junks of jello. Only her huge fake tits remained unchanged, oddly out of place on her diminished body

Although she had aged only a couple of years, it had hit her like a truck. Her crow's feet were now deeper and her jawline softer. Her makeup-caked face glistened with sweat, the layers of foundation and contour turning slick and runny. The fillers, the Botox, the endless collagen injections, all she had done to mimic youth, seemed to liquefy under the heat. More than a wax figure under hot lights, she looked like one that had been tossed into a lit oven.

Her skin flushed deep red with rage, sweat sliding down her temple. Thick steroid-fed veins bulged across her forehead and neck, her yellowing teeth bared in a clenched snarl.

She shook with fury, fists curled, eyes burning with humiliation, ruined and about to explode.

Suddenly a burst of blue sparks engulfed Katie's last ten copper chips, and half of them dispersed into wisps of smoke, making her muscles sag a little more.

"Hey, what the fuck!" She yelled indignantly at Madame X, pointing to the spot where her missing chips had been.

"Remember the consequences of losing gold chips I have warned you about so many times, dear. On average, muscle mass declines by 8% per decade after age 40, and you just turned 51. Aging has diminished your muscle mass, and therefore, your chips." Said Madame X as didactically as ever.

"Bullshit!", Katie snarled. "Give them back!"

"I'm afraid that is not possible." Madame X replied coolly. "This is an outcome you accepted when you swore the Oath. The cards may seem random and uncaring, but they are always fair."

Aleksandra watched the exchange, noting how Katie's defeat had pushed her to the brink. She was teetering on the edge of doing something incredibly stupid, unless she found a way to calm down and accept the loss. How pathetic she looked now! Older, sagging, and furious over just five copper chips, when not

long ago she had gambled them away like they meant nothing.

“This is rigged... this whole thing is fucking rigged ...”, Katie muttered, tearing at her once-perfect glossy Hollywood waves, now a disheveled mess.

“You are working together ...”, she hissed, pointing first to Madame X and then to Linda. “You and that fucking chink!”

Linda’s face tightened with anger at the slur, but she said nothing.

“Ms. Palmer, you forget yourself.”, Madame X said. Her voice sliced through the air like a scalpel. It was a tone Aleksandra had never heard from her before. A final warning.

“Fuck off! Give me back my chips right now, you cunt!”, Katie exploded, leaping to her feet and slamming her hand on the table.

Madame X blinked slowly as the echoes of Katie’s outburst faded into the shadows of the grand chamber. She then glared at the haggard bimbo, with eyes cold as steel.

“What did you just call me?” Her voice was low and deadly.

Katie drew a sharp breath, frozen under the weight of Madame X’s glare. For a moment, she was completely still.

“I-I’m sorry ...”, she stammered.

“Not as much as you are about to be.”, Madame X replied coldly. “For too long, you have reaped the rewards of this hallowed night. But not anymore. You have grown arrogant, complacent, and now you have violated the Oath with your crass disrespect.”

Aleksandra caught something in her voice, a gleeful cruelty bubbling under her anger.

“You will be punished for this transgression.”, Madame X said, raising her hand.

“No! No, please, no!”, Katie cried, as blinding blue arcs of electricity burst from

the cards and struck her body.

Aleksandra and Linda recoiled in unison, flinching as they pressed themselves into their chairs, trying to stay as far from the table as possible without fleeing outright.

Katie shriek was long, ragged, and awful, while the bolts pierced her body. For a moment, the light was too blinding to look at directly. Then, silence. Her shrunken body collapsed onto the table, landing awkwardly on her now ridiculously disproportionate giant fake tits.

Aleksandra stared, a mix of disgust and horrified fascination tightening in her chest. Now, at last, she understood the true price of breaking the Oath.

Madame X had taken everything Katie had ever earned, muscle, height, youth, stripping it all away. What was left wasn't simply Katie as she might have been without the game, but something far worse. A mocking, distorted parody of that possibility. A scrawny, wrinkled woman in her sixties who looked like she brushed her teeth with whisky, smoked a pack of cigarettes daily and had never touched a dumbbell in her entire life.

Yet the signs of Katie's past as a habitual steroid still clung to her like a cruel joke. Her skin was pitted and leathery and her once incipient roid gut now spilled over her bikini bottom like a flabby apron of flesh.

Her hair was graying and greasy, and her neck wattle sagged over the golden letters of her now loose choker. She was shorter too, no longer the 5'8" she was just before her outburst, but back to her original 5'5" from so many years ago, maybe even less.

The gleaming, airbrushed muscle diva was gone, and what remained resembled a half-melted Barbie doll. She groaned, propping herself up with trembling arms and stared in horror at her aged hands, the loose folds of skin and flabby muscle sagging from her arms.

"No, no, no...", she muttered in disbelief.

Without a sound, two of the uncanny, impeccably uniformed stewards appeared behind her. Aleksandra glanced quickly at the door, the only entrance to the room, which remained closed.

“Mrs. Palmer is leaving.”, Madame X said almost absently, as if announcing a change in the weather, not even bothering to look at her.

“Get your fucking hands off me!”, Katie shouted to the encroaching stewards, a flicker of defiance surging back, and pathetically slapped the closest one, who didn’t even flinch. She, on the other hand, lost her balance and fell, landing heavily on her bony, sagging backside.

The stewards remained impassive for a couple of seconds staring at her whimper in pain on the floor. Then, each took one of her arms and began dragging her toward the exit.

“No! You can’t do this to me! You can’t- !”, Katie howled, kicking uselessly with her skinny legs. The door closed behind her and the stewards like a tomb sealing shut, her voice cut off mid-scream.

After the echoes of Katie’s desperate protests faded into silence, Madame X gave a small shrug, as if brushing a speck of dust from her massive shoulder.

“Some people take losing poorly.”, she said lightly. Then she nodded to Linda, who had returned to her original guarded demeanor, giving her permission to claim her winnings.

Linda gathered the shimmering chips with the same calm, deliberate hand she had used all night. As her fingers closed over the last one, the air around her seemed to thicken, the light subtly warping as if reality itself were bracing for impact, and her body exploded with muscle.

Linda absorbed forty-seven pounds of dense, lean muscle taken from Aleksandra and Katie, along with fifteen pounds of additional tissue as she claimed three inches of height from Katie. The transformation was at once violent and glorious, her frame surged outward in all directions, bone and flesh stretching and ballooning into new dimensions of power.

Her neck lengthened slightly, but her colossal traps quickly caught up, swelling to the point of nearly brushing her ears. Her lats and pecs surged outward, stacking into a chest so thick and broad it completely eclipsed her chair. The sheer size of her upper body tapered dramatically into a comparatively narrow waist, rimmed with cobblestone abs that vanished under the table’s edge.

A deep, satisfied moan escaped her lips as she extended her arms, her massive muscles shifting and swelling with the motion in a mesmerizing display of might. Her biceps and lats were so engorged they pressed against each other with every subtle move, yet she navigated her bulk effortlessly, clearly at home in her newly enhanced form.

Aleksandra studied Linda across the table, sizing her up. She had grown massively and was now actually taller than her, which she couldn't help but resent. With the three inches she had taken from Ruth and another three from Katie, Linda now stood at 5'7", a full inch taller. And with all the mass she'd accumulated, she had to weigh around 290 pounds, 77 more than Aleksandra. It was unsettling how she had stayed quiet, patient, carving her way through the game, growing steadily while weaker, less fortunate players fell away. Now only the two of them remained.

After having absorbed so much steroid-enhanced muscles for her rivals, Linda's physique took on a distinctly rougher appearance. Her facial features sharpened, her chin became more pronounced, her brow subtly more prominent, giving her a hardened, almost statuesque intensity. With so much dense muscle packed onto her frame, her already competition-level body fat percentage dropped even lower. Every striation in her muscles twitched visibly with the slightest movement, and thick, garden-hose veins surged beneath her skin, snaking across her entire body in a vivid roadmap of raw, unnatural power.

The two years of youth she had taken from Katie barely softened her appearance, the sheer intensity of her newly amassed bulk masked any subtle signs of age reversal. Still, more of her graying strands darkened to a rich black, and her hair, once neatly contained in a bun, now burst free in a thick, voluminous cascade over her shoulders. A single stylish gray lock remained, falling artfully across her forehead.

Linda blinked a couple of times, then calmly removed her glasses, setting them down beside her on the table.

"Looks like I won't be needing these for now.", she said with a satisfied chuckle, her voice now deeper by a full octave.

Then a sudden pop and tear rang out as the overstressed straps of her bikini top split apart, finally defeated by her body's expansion.

Her naked chest was a sight to behold, a protruding shelf of rock-hard flesh that put to shame any heavyweight male bodybuilder Aleksandra could think of. A sharp pang of jealousy stirred in her at the sight, quickly followed by a growing warmth in her crotch. She tried to restrain herself from rubbing her thick, hard thighs together, with little success.

Meanwhile Linda was trying to mend the torn pieces of her garment, perhaps out of a deeply ingrained sense of modesty from her distant youth. As she struggled to fish out one of the cups of her top from under her meaty pecs, Madame X picked up it from the string and flung it away carelessly.

“That won’t be necessary, dear.”, she said in a husky voice, tracing her finger across the deep ribbed crevice between Linda’s pecs. “It would be a shame to cover something this marvelous.” Linda’s eyes widened, caught like a deer in headlights, as Madame X’s fingers followed the striations of her pecs.

Madame X suddenly grew bolder and grabbed the thick slab of meat of Linda’s left pec, softly digging her long pale fingers into her skin, like checking the ripeness of a fruit.

“I’m so glad to have you here in this hallowed night, dear!”, she said with cheerful approval, biting her lower lip.

Linda’s cheeks flushed pink at this. An incongruous, sudden flash of adolescent embarrassment crossed her chiseled features, softening them for an instant. However, it faded quickly, as a mischievous smile curled on her lips. Without a word, she made her swollen new pecs bounce, rolling like waves crashing on the shore.

Madame X let out a sharp, delighted gasp at this, still grabbing the generous handful of twitching pec meat, and fanning herself coquettishly with her free hand.

“Oh my goodness! Simply exquisite!”, she said as she withdrew her hand, letting her fingers linger on Linda’s erect dark nipple for a second, stroking it softly between thumb and forefinger like a tender farewell.

“We really should get to know each other better afterwards, dear.”, Madame X purred, as she and Linda looked into each other’s eyes with complicit pleasure.

Aleksandra had been watching their interaction in mute bewilderment, unable to reconcile what she was seeing with everything she thought she knew.

In all her years playing in Madame X's game, Aleksandra had never seen her show so much endearment towards any other player, let alone a newcomer like Linda.

Of all the unexpected, shocking things that had transpired that night, this was by far the one that had rattled her the most.

A slow chill crept down her spine. What if Katie had been right all along? What if all this was rigged?

Madame X, meanwhile, was already shuffling her cards with that same serene grace, as if nothing at all had occurred.

HAND 8

"Ante up, ladies.", said Madame X, her voice laced with excitement, her smile just a bit too wide and her teeth a bit too bare.

The two copper chips in the pot marked just how close the game was to its end.

Madame X dealt the cards with practiced grace, each one gliding across the table and landing sharp and silent before its player.

Aleksandra took a quick look at her cards. Jack of Hearts, Jack of Diamonds, Jack of Clubs, Eight of Spades, Two of Diamonds. A solid Three of a Kind.

She glanced at Linda for a moment, searching for any sign, and there it was, the faint tremor in her left eyebrow, betraying her weak hand.

"I raise five.", she said in as neutral a tone as possible

"I raise fifteen.", Linda replied while pushing her chips.

Aleksandra was not surprised by Linda's action, with as many chips as she had, unnecessarily high bets became just another tool of intimidation.

"I call it.", she replied, feeling a pang of resentment toward her rival for pushing

her into this situation.

“Draw round, dears.”, said Madame X.

Aleksandra decided to keep her hand, it was a strong hand and she trusted that it would be enough on this time.

Linda, for her part, exchanged three of her cards, clearly in need of stronger ones. Aleksandra turned her full attention to her as soon as she received her new cards, looking for the slightest sign of weakness.

And there it was, the tremor, as quick as a blink.

“I raise ten.”, she said confidently, staring a Linda dead in the eye

“I raise twenty”, Linda replied in a dry voice, as she pushed her bet into the pot, more out of spite than anything else. Her right eyebrow twitched slightly.

“I call it with one gold.”, Aleksandra dropped the shiny metal disc into the pot, almost disdainfully. She knew Linda was bluffing, and she couldn’t help but rub it in her face.

“Let us see those cards, dears,”, said Madame X,

Aleksandra laid her Three of a Kind on the table, and caught a flicker of anger in Linda’s statuesque features as her rival revealed her own cards. Ten of Clubs, Ten of Spades, Six of Hearts, Six of Clubs, and the Queen of Diamonds, a Two Pair. A decent hand on another circumstances, perhaps, but not the kind Linda would usually go all-in with.

Aleksandra watched intently as 36 pounds of muscle were drained from Linda’s hulking frame. It was an astounding amount for a single transformation, yet Linda endured it with remarkable composure. Her body shrank evenly, her volume retreating in steady waves, arms, chest, shoulders, all pulling back toward more human proportions.

Even so, she remained enormous by any standard, easily still in the realm of male bodybuilding competitors. But compared to the mountain of flesh she had just been, the difference was stark.

Aleksandra’s eyes flicked to Madame X, who let out a faint, disappointed pout, her gaze lingering mournfully on Linda’s pecs as they deflated to something merely impressive, no longer legendary.

The pile of chips began to shimmer again. Aleksandra steadied herself and sat up straight, bracing to receive her winnings. She inhaled sharply as the mass Linda had lost surged into her own body. The sensation was rapturous, a molten warmth pressing outward from within, expanding her muscles with slow, deliberate power. Her limbs swelled, her frame thickened, and the pressure brought a shuddering exhale from deep in her chest.

This was Linda’s mass, dense, seasoned, potent and Aleksandra could clearly feel the difference. The lingering traces of Ruth, Chloe Ann, and Katie had already faded into the background, like whispers drowned out by a commanding voice.

Aleksandra felt an overwhelming cascade of warmth radiate from her crotch through every inch of her body, her mind awash in a sea of bliss. She bit her lower lip, closed her eyes, and let her head tilt back slightly, savoring the moment of pure pleasure.

When it ended, she stared at her hands, then clenched them into fists. The muscles in her forearms bulged and quivered, hard and alive. She smiled, but it didn’t last. The elation turned to hunger. She wasn’t done, not even close.

Last year she had stood 5'10" and weighed 260 pounds of raw, honed muscle. She wasn’t there yet, not in mass, not in stature, and she burned with the need to reclaim every lost inch and pound.

She locked eyes on Linda. She wanted it all, and she wouldn’t stop until it was hers.

HAND 9

“Ante up, ladies.”, said Madame X, looking straight into Aleksandra’s eyes, sending a shudder through her body.

Aleksandra took one of her copper chips and placed it in the center of the table, this time it felt even heavier and colder than the one she had paid the first ante. A sense of finality washed over her at that moment, the conviction that this hand

would either make or break her.

Madame X shuffled the deck one last time, almost ponderously, before dealing the cards to her last two players.

Aleksandra stared for a moment at the pitch-black rectangles in front of her, and then picked them up. She had Queens of Diamonds, Clubs, and Hearts plus the 10 of Hearts and Ace of Hearts, a Three of a Kind

Just a Queen of Spades away from a having one of the strongest Four of a Kind.

Her pulse surged, but she kept her expression steady, letting none of it show.

“I raise five.”, she said, calm and casual.

“I raise twenty.”, Linda replied.

“I call it.”, Aleksandra said. There it was again, the tell, that faint tremor in Linda’s eyebrow.

“Draw round, dears.”, said Madame X.

Aleksandra traded her 10 of Hearts, while Linda kept her hand.

Aleksandra nearly forgot to breathe the moment she saw her new card. Queen of Spades, the Four of a Kind was complete. She had the game locked down. She had to use all her self-control to keep her face stony and her posture perfectly still. This opportunity to win would not pass her by.

“I raise twenty.” This was the time to play hard, no more half-measures. Either Linda would fold, leaving her the entire pot, or she would call, making it even bigger, only to be defeated afterwards.

Aleksandra’s eyes lingered on Linda’s muscles, admiring the way their popped at even the slightest gestures. So full and bouncy she could almost taste them. She felt her mouth watering and her clit throbbing with rhythmic pulses of radiating heat.

She stared at Linda’s pile of chips with naked greed, only to meet Linda’s gaze and find the same hunger staring back. They both wanted what the other had,

driven by a ravenous desire to take it all.

“I raise fifty.”, Linda said nonchalantly, pushing the massive pile of chips into the pot.

Aleksandra’s mouth went dry, as she slid another thirty copper chips into the pot, the clink of metal sharp and final. That made seventy out of her original seventy-four. Nearly everything. A reckless move, except she knew Linda was bluffing.

Her heart pounded, but her hand was steady. Four Queens. The strongest she had held all night.

And then there was the tell, that subtle twitch in Linda’s eyebrow. Barely there, but enough. That tiny betrayal sealed it.

She met Linda’s eyes and allowed herself the smallest, coldest smile.

But Linda didn’t flinch, but calmly reached into her stack instead.

“I raise, five gold, five silver ...”, she said, placing them on the table, the gleam of the higher metals striking like a blade.

“... plus fifty-five copper.”

Aleksandra’s stomach tightened.

Linda wasn’t just calling. She was escalating, throwing in the bulk of her own earnings. If she was bluffing, she was risking everything to sell it. And she didn’t look nervous anymore.

Even with four Queens clenched in her grasp like a secret weapon, Aleksandra no longer felt like the predator, but the prey. Cornered by Linda’s serene confidence and outrageously high bet, Aleksandra felt the pressure closing in like a vice.

Her stack was no match. Linda had her out-chipped. But there was only one way through.

Aleksandra reached for the rest of her chips, five gold, five silver, and the last four copper, and pushed them all into the pot with a single, sweeping motion.

“All in.”, she said, her voice a notch lower than she expected.

The world seemed to still. Her heart pounded against her ribs like it wanted out.

“Let us see those cards, dears.”, said Madame X, her eyes gleaming with delight, savoring every moment of the game’s climax.

Aleksandra moved first, laying the cards of her powerhouse hand.

She cast a lightning-quick glance at Linda’s face, stoney still, unreadable, as her opponent slowly revealed her own cards.

Ace of Spades.

Two.

Three.

Four.

Five.

A straight flush.

Linda had won.

Aleksandra sat frozen, her mouth slightly open, as if struck in the face.

Across the table, Linda held her gaze, and raised her right eyebrow in a small, deliberate twitch. A fake tell, she had player her like a fiddle.

She stared at the blinding shimmer of the grotesquely huge pile of chips, as if trapped in a dream, a prisoner inside her own body.

This time, she couldn’t even prepare for the impact of her debt’s payment, which fell upon her like an avalanche of agony. She felt an icy whirlwind tearing at her body, ripping the flesh from her bones, unending. Then her vision went black.

She came to with her face pressed against the table, every inch of her body aching as if she had been stabbed from the inside out. With a groan, she weakly pulled herself upright, only to meet the amused, cruel gazes of Madame X and

Linda, who watched her fall with thinly veiled satisfaction.

As she leaned back against the chair’s backrest, she realized how her feet dangled, barely brushing the floor.

This couldn’t be. She had lost everything. Everything.

Shrouded in a fog of nausea, her mind was still able to execute the calculations of the figures that had obsessed her for a year.

She had started this game as a 5'6", 215 lb., 36-year-old woman.

She had lost all her gains, plus her starting 40 copper chips, 5 silver chips, and 5 gold chips,

She had lost 40 pounds of muscle, 5 inches of height, 25 pounds of general body mass and 5 years of life.

What remained was a short, stocky woman in her early forties.

There was no way out of this.

Aleksandra Oryolska, the ever-young amazon goddess was gone forever.

Time seemed to stop around her, but she could still hear her own heartbeat, growing louder and faster until it became a deafening hum.

Madame X and Linda, insultingly beautiful and powerful, kept staring at her with mocking smiles frozen in time.

Meanwhile the huge pile of chips gleamed in the center of the table, waiting to be claimed by the winner’s greedy hands.

This was unfair.

This was...

Bullshit!

“I beg your pardon, dear?”, said Madame X, raising an eyebrow, her smile fading slightly. “Do you have any complains on the outcome of this game.”

At that moment Aleksandra realized the outburst that had escaped from her mouth, and time resumed its regular pace.

“I ...” Aleksandra’s mouth felt dry as if stuffed with sand.

Madame X regarded her through half-lowered lids, and continued talking in a lofty, almost sermon-like tone.

“You, better than any other of my players, knew the risks and rewards of this game. For years Fortune has favored you and tonight that blessing has ended. Such is the nature of luck. Our acquaintanceship ends tonight as well, since you have squandered the opportunity I gave you to redeem yourself. Take solace in the memory of all the years in which you enjoyed these boons, and don’t let yourself be poisoned by resentment. The cards may seem random and uncaring but they are always f-”

Aleksandra could barely register what Madame X was saying anymore, the deafening hum had returned, now accompanied by a piercing laughter somehow coming out of Linda’s smiling but closed mouth. She couldn’t take it anymore, and finally snapped.

“Fuck you and fuck your cards, bitch!” She yelled as she tore hers, decapitating the four Queens and splitting the Ace of Hearts in two.

A deathly silence fell over the room, a stillness so intense that Aleksandra could hear the beating of her own heart.

Madame X’s face shifted from her perennial look of patrician haughtiness to one of absolute fury.

“You ... You dim-witted wretch! How you dare!?” Madame X howled as she stood up in all her towering stature, slamming the table with her large hands. The stacks of poker chips on the table crumbled in a symphony of rattlesnakes. Her body shook with rage, sending a seismic swarm of spasms across her bulging muscles. Aleksandra felt bolted to her chair, paralyzed with such terror that her mouth couldn’t even begin to stammer a useless plea for mercy.

“Your punishment will be ...” Her voice suddenly trailed off as her eyes focused on the damaged cards. Little blue sparks had begun to jump between their torn halves. Aleksandra noticed at that moment, with an unreal feeling of detachment,

how much the faces of the Queens in the cards resembled Madame X.

“Oh. Oh no.” Madame X muttered in a low, panicked voice.

An intense flash of blue electric fire leapt from the torn cards to the rest of the table, engulfing it in eye-searing light. The chips and cards burnt in an instant, illuminating the blank faces of the three women. Beyond them, there was only darkness.

Then a jolt of electricity rose from the table and hit Linda in the middle of her broad chest, knocking her off her chair. Aleksandra caught a glimpse of her rival’s wide-open, terrified eyes, before she disappeared behind the edge of the table.

A second jolt, much more powerful followed immediately, this time hitting Madame X, who managed to hold on to the edge of the table and stand in a precarious balance. She howled in pain as another jolt jumped this time from her massive pecs straight to Aleksandra.

Aleksandra felt a rush of energy coursing through her body like nothing she had ever experienced before, an overwhelming, orgasmic sensation of power and bliss. Around her, time seemed to slow down almost to a complete standstill.

But even while immersed in that unreal haze of pleasure, she still noticed that something was happening to Madame X’s body. She was shrinking.

The width and height of her body collapsed and her chest, shoulders and arms lost their bulging, striated definition. As her lats dwindled, her strapless black gown slid off her body, exposing a physique still extremely muscular, but no longer superhuman.

The power rush ended as suddenly as it had begun, and Aleksandra found herself once again experiencing the normal passage of time. She was vaguely aware that her body had regained its fullness, not the one it had had at the beginning of this game, but the one she had boasted a year ago. She felt bigger, stronger, but couldn’t allow herself to enjoy her transformation, because death was staring her in the face.

Madame X’s charged towards Aleksandra with an unnatural swiftness for her size, her face distorted into a mask of rage. She jumped naked and barefoot onto

the large circular table, which creaked under her enormous weight, and then launched herself at Aleksandra, knocking her down in an unstoppable avalanche of muscle.

They rolled over the ground struggling, but Madame X was still much larger and stronger than Aleksandra, and easily overpowered her, slamming her against the floor and sitting of top of her. In an instant Madame X's hands were locked around Aleksandra's throat like a vise, strangling her to death.

Aleksandra tried desperately to free herself from Madame X's massive weight, but it was like trying to move a mountain. Her vision started to blur out as she ran out of air. She grabbed Madame X's wrists to fight them off, but it was useless, she was too weak.

She was done.

Suddenly Aleksandra felt a new sharp jolt of energy course through her body just as Madame X's hands faltered, their grip weaker. She felt lighter too, still incredibly heavy, but no longer unmovable. Aleksandra grabbed Madame X's wrists with renewed vigor and finally pried them off.

She gasped for air, her lungs burning as her vision started to clear. She could see Madame X's face again, her furious expression now replaced by one of mounting panic, eyes bulging and teeth bare. Her jet-black hair had turned gray, and her ageless features were gone, destroyed both by her snarling grimace and the increasingly deeper wrinkles and creases that were consuming her face.

Aleksandra roared as she lifted her arms and upper body, rising a terrified Madame X with a strength she had never dreamed of possessing. She threw the shrunken, aging woman to the side, where she fell with a loud thud.

Aleksandra stood up as fast as she could, her heartbeat banging against her eardrums. It took her a few dizzying seconds to get used to her increased height, but luckily for her, Madame X had only just gotten up clumsily off the ground. She looked out of breath, hunched over, with her massive muscles sagging under their own weight.

They stared at each other dead in the eye for a second, now almost the same height and build, but with Aleksandra's body looking more solid and defined. Smaller jolts of electricity kept jumping between their bodies, and with each one

Aleksandra felt more powerful and alive. Meanwhile Madame X's eyes widened with terror, desperately aware of her diminishing body.

She was getting older, smaller and weaker, whatever advantage she might still have was running out quickly. She let out a bestial growl and charged towards Aleksandra again, her hands clenched like claws, but she was now much slower than before, and Aleksandra managed to lock hands with her in a painful grip. She was shocked at how strong Madame X still was, and how she could barely match her raw power.

Madame X quickly gained the upper hand and pushed Aleksandra down and backwards. Her grip was so tight that Aleksandra felt that the bones in her hands were about to shatter, making her howl in pain. Madame X's gaunt face lighted up with a vicious joy at this, a crazed smile stretching from ear to ear.

For an instant she clung to a delusional hope of victory, that her aging body was still strong enough to destroy her rival. Then a whirlwind of sparks began to fly from her to Aleksandra, so intense that it was almost blinding. Madame X's eyes widened in shock as she felt her strength being drained away once more. Her muscles deflated and softened, turning into flabby flesh hanging loosely on her bones. Her sagging face became grey, and clumps of brittle white hair starting falling from her head

Meanwhile, Aleksandra was flooded by a new wave of vitality, one as potent as the one she had experienced after tearing apart her cards. She saw the muscles in her arms bulge and quiver with newfound strength, the veins of her forearms bulging, beating like writhing snakes.

Madame X's once towering frame kept shrinking until she was no longer eye to eye with Aleksandra. She looked up at her with panic etched on her increasingly decrepit face. A terrible realization seemed to dawn upon her, that whatever chance she had had to turn the tide was gone, and all she could do now was to delay the inevitable, even for just another agonizing minute. Her entire body trembled from the strain of the insurmountable force Aleksandra was exerting, her aging muscles and joints pushed beyond their limit every second their hands remained locked. She contorted in pain as her body kept collapsing on itself, her yellowing teeth bared like a cornered animal.

Aleksandra, sensing that final shift in power, pressed harder, her hands now

dwarfing Madame X's. Her frame grew even wider and taller, she shivered as her whole body erupted with thick cords of bulging muscle, while her rival's body ebbed to nothing. With a triumphant roar, she finally overpowered the withered Madame X, forcing her to her knees.

At that moment, a cavalcade of images, sounds and sensations flooded Aleksandra's mind. In a second, she knew what delicacies Madame X had had for breakfast today, the address of the Italian artisan that made her heel-less wedge shoes, or what kind of exotic orchids grew in the manor's greenhouse.

Aleksandra panicked immediately at this mental intrusion, fearing that Madame X may be somehow attacking her psychically in a last desperate attempt to turn the tide of the fight. But as the images grew clearer and more numerous, she realized that she was actually absorbing her mind, as she had done with her body. Madame X's memories, intelligence, arcane powers, and maybe even her very soul, were being drained from her.

Madame X's horrified gaze revealed that she was at once aware of the degradation of her mind and completely powerless to stop it. Soon there were no thoughts left behind her eyes, only fear and fury. She was no longer powerful, no longer imposing, just a decrepit old woman. Her paper-thin skin was stretched so tautly over her brittle bones that it looked as if it might split, and the knotted veins protruding from her gaunt limbs were dark and swollen. A few rotten teeth fell from her drooling mouth while she laboriously gasped for breath.

Yet her arthritic hands remained locked with Aleksandra's, still pushing with a pathetically minuscule amount of force. She was simply too stubborn and senile to accept that she was already dead. Aleksandra released her hands from her grip easily and stepped back as Madame X collapsed into a crumpled heap of skin and bones. Once she hit the floor a series of quick jolts jumped from her emaciated body to Aleksandra, carrying the last remnants of her strength. She shrank further, shriveling into a grey skinned mummified ruin.

Somehow, the living corpse of Madame X's still managed to crawl on all fours and glared at Aleksandra with a look of absolute hatred in her sunken cataract-ridden eyes. A death rattle came hissing through her gaping toothless mouth. Her skeletal arms quivered as she struggled uselessly to lift herself from the ground, before finally giving in.

Her entire body shattered into dust at the impact.

Just at that instant Aleksandra's mind was assaulted by a final deluge of past memories, far greater than all the previous ones put together. The transfer was immediate and violent, and Aleksandra's eyes widened in shock as it flooded her brain.

She felt as if she were standing on the deck of a ship caught in a violent storm. Her stomach churned, and she staggered, barely able to keep her footing. Waves of nausea crashed over her, each one more intense than the last. She clutched her throbbing head with both hands and clenched her eyes shut, trying to contain the overwhelming influx of memories. She was dazzled by a flashing stream of glimpses of Madame X's life, scenes of unearthly beauty, eldritch horror and blood-stained pacts.

A particular set of memories stood from all the others, because of the uncanny familiarity Aleksandra felt towards them. A very muscular woman in her thirties, with short auburn hair, square jaw and piercing blue eyes, sitting at a very special poker game, year after year. She saw herself through Madame X's eyes, and felt her disdain and her glee at her defeat. The images of her own face multiplied and superimposed themselves like a fever dream, while the echo of a haughty laugh pierced her eardrums.

Aleksandra knew she couldn't endure this torment much longer, the sheer volume of knowledge threatened to tear her mind apart. She fell to her knees, gasping for breath, her massive body trembling uncontrollably. She gritted her teeth, and summoned all her willpower. She wouldn't allow herself to be destroyed by the fading remnants of Madame X's being.

Slowly, the storm began to subside. The nausea ebbed, and the chaotic whirl of thoughts started to organize itself. Aleksandra took deep, steadying breaths, forcing herself to calm down. She could feel the power coursing through her, the wisdom of a unnaturally long life now hers to command.

As clarity returned, she realized the magnitude of what had just happened. She had not only defeated Madame X but had also inherited all her vast arcane power. The experience had left her exhausted, but transformed at a primal, fundamental level.

Aleksandra rose to her feet, her breath heavy from the fight but full of a new

sense of purpose and power. Suddenly, the cards of Madame X's magical poker deck materialized from thin air, swirling around her like a swarm of black and white wasps.

Drawn by an unseen force, Aleksandra extended her hand. The cards, shimmering with a faint blue glow, flew towards her, arranging themselves neatly in her palm. The four Queens and the Ace of Hearts were the last to land on the top of the deck, looking like brand new once again.

With a decisive motion, she closed her hand. The cards vanished in a burst of blue flame, leaving only a faint warmth in her palm. Aleksandra knew now that she could summon them at will, and found herself looking forward to that occasion with eager anticipation.

She also knew, with the same instinctive certainty, that this magical accident had altered her body further, as it had her mind, but still needed the confirmation of a mirror. Her bare feet stepped onto the small mound of dust that used to be Madame X, leaving a trail of ashen footprints in her wake.

She stopped at some distance from one of the mirrors that flanked the door, realizing that if she came any closer, she would not be able to see the entirety of her colossal body at once. An unknown alabaster goddess with jet black hair stared back at her from the polished surface.

She looked in disbelief at her own naked reflection, as if she were watching Madame X herself mimicking her movements. In a way, that was the case. This was her now, she was Madame X.

Her blue eyes were the only remainder that she had once been Aleksandra Oryolska.

All of Madame X's memories had been incorporated into her own, although accessing them felt like rummaging through the drawers of a strange house. But with practice and time, that division would eventually blur and vanish. She knew that this was already happening, second by second.

As Aleksandra sifted through the freshest layers of Madame X's memories, she discovered with some amusement that their hostess hadn't been helping Linda after all. Her winning streak had been just a mix of luck and undeniable skill. Madame X simply had been fond of her self-discipline and growing physical

allure.

Aleksandra put the survey of past memories aside as she let her hands wander over her massive new body, savoring its hardness, its power. She traced the crevices separating her cobblestone-like abs with her fingers and grabbed the solid meaty mass of her pecs with delight. Just as she was exploring the warm moistness of her sex, a little sobbing sound jolted out of her reverie.

She walked around the room with careful steps, following the sobs, surprised by her own nimbleness despite her enormous new size. As her steps took her to the large table, the sobs became muffled. She knelt down and found a small, skeletal naked figure curled up under the table, teary-eyed and covering her mouth with emaciated hands. This was all that was left of Linda Eun-Jung Park.

The magical meltdown that had destroyed Madame X had also affected her, removing not only her winnings, but also all her initial tokens. That should have turned her into a 4’8, 90 lb, 61 year old woman, but just by looking at her Aleksandra knew her looses had been far greater. She had been reduced to a withered little thing with ashen wrinkled skin and locks of thin gray hair spilling over her face and shoulders. Compared to hers, Katie’s transformation seemed merciful.

Linda looked at her with wide eyes, filled with pure terror. She tried to escape, but her weakened limbs only allowed her to crawl. Aleksandra knew that she barely had the strength to stand up. “P-please don’t hurt me!” She begged in a raspy voice, sobbing pathetically. Her emaciated chest rose and fell painfully as she choked for air. “J-just let me go!” She said raising her stick-thin arms and small bony hands over her head in a useless gesture of defense.

Aleksandra knelt down beside the decrepit woman, talking her in the softest tone of voice she could muster. “Calm down, I’m not going to hurt you.” Linda let out a sob of relief, her small, skeletal body shaking like a leaf. “Now stand up.” She said, extending her hand. At that moment she noticed the sudden strangeness of her own voice, which had turned into a rich, deep contralto with a crisp Mid-Atlantic accent. Linda grabbed her hand with her twig-like fingers and very slowly the two women got up from the ground.

Even on her feet, Linda barely reached Aleksandra’s thighs, her spine bent under the weight of an age that was not her own. Aleksandra felt a pang of pity for her,

and without thinking twice she put her large hand on her gray-haired head. Linda winced and gasped, but did not move. “I will give back to you what you have lost.” Aleksandra said aloud.

Aleksandra felt the years of life leaving her body through her hand and entering Linda’s. The transformation was instantaneous, Linda’s hair turned black and full, with some gray strands, and her skin regained its former color and smoothness. She grew a bit taller as her backbone stretched back to its original length and stability.

Aleksandra proceeded then to restore Linda’s lost height, along with its corresponding body mass. Linda’s body grew in size, becoming fuller and healthier looking. Once this transference was done, Aleksandra withdrew her hand to get a better look at her. Her eyes met Linda’s tearful gaze, who sobbed words of gratitude as she hugged one of Aleksandra’s massive, column-like legs.

Aleksandra took a moment to analyze Linda’s physique. So this is what she was without her extraordinary genetics and decades of diligently pumping iron. A flabby, middle aged short woman with small sagging tits, faint stretch marks on her pouchy belly and a flat ass. Pathetic. She sighed and reached out her hand again, this time to give Linda back her high-quality muscle mass and her gift for gaining it.

A sudden indignant thought flashed through her mind at that instant. Why was she doing this? Why should she help this scrawny little bitch. How would this benefit her in any way? She was taken aback by this newfound selfishness. She had always been competitive, individualistic, even self-centered, but this callousness... was it hers at all? Could it be a remnant of Madame X, incorporated into her being along with everything else she had taken from her?

She pondered this new facet of herself for a moment that seemed to last forever, deciding whether to remove it or accept it. A complacent smile appeared on her full lips as she let it sink within her. She felt much better now, finally complete.

Her attention returned to the petite middle aged Asian woman who looked at her expectantly. What should she do with her, then? An idea began to germinate in her mind. “A very fun idea, indeed.” She thought as she placed her hand on Linda’s head again.

Aleksandra felt a rush of inspiration, the powers she had inherited from Madame X were burning inside her, and the sensation was intoxicating. She now saw Linda as a lump of clay ready to be molded at her whim. The path was so clear now.

She began drawing on the immense reserves of youth contained within her body. Now she knew that this little poker game was just one of the many esoteric activities Madame X used to profit from.

A torrent of youth entered Linda's body through her head, melting the years away. She went from her fifties to her forties in an instant "W-what are you doing to me?" Linda asked in a slightly higher-pitched voice, that quickly turned panicked. "S-stop!" Aleksandra raised an eyebrow at such display of insolence, and decided to nip it in the bud. She stopped the flow of youth and extended her mind into Linda's with the ease of a studied gesture.

Linda's mind felt like a rusty, jagged butcher's knife. Aleksandra could feel her deepest secrets and most intimate memories. She saw her cruelty, and the joy she got in being a petty tyrant at home and at work. She was a particularly strict librarian after all, Aleksandra noticed with some amusement. She saw her loveless marriage, the broken spirit of her husband, the children that had severed all ties with her, and her present loneliness. She was in dire need of a change of attitude, and Aleksandra was happy to oblige. She engulfed the knife with her own mind, and crushed it with all her willpower, reshaping it into a pleasant lotus flower, all smooth curves and round edges.

Linda let out a few moans while her mind was rearranged into something more of Aleksandra's liking, which then turned into giggling when the stream of youth was reopened. "It tickles!" Said the cheerful voice of a young woman, once Linda reached her early twenties. "This is going to tickle too, dear." Said Aleksandra as she grabbed her around the waist and lifted her effortlessly off the ground. Linda gasped with surprise and then burst into raucous giggling while Aleksandra carefully sat her on the table. "But I need you to be still while I make you perfect. Do you want to be perfect, dear?" "Yes, mistress." Linda replied in a thin voice while nodding obediently. Aleksandra smiled at how charming the respectful term of address sounded on her lips.

Aleksandra stared with critical eye at the nude petite young woman sitting on the table, who looked back at her with awed eyes. Twenty-year-old Linda wasn't

ugly at all, but she wasn't particularly remarkable either. Her lips were still too thin and her face too angular, although her high cheekbones were salvageable.

The rest of her body showed a surprising amount of potential, a blank slate in which Aleksandra could create a masterpiece. It was small, well-proportioned and quite toned even after losing so much muscle mass. The skin had a healthy glow and the stretch marks on her stomach had vanished along with the memory of the children that had caused them. There was a lot of room for improvement, but the foundation for something exquisite was already there.

Aleksandra decided to start from the top, improving Linda's hair first. She pulled it gently, making it longer, thicker and darker, and let it fall over Linda's back rippling and shining like a cascade of silky obsidian. Then she moved to the skin, rubbing it very carefully with her fingertips. It changed at her touch, turning paler and smoother until it looked like the finest porcelain, completely hairless besides her scalp, eyebrows and eyelashes. Linda shivered and moaned softly as her rosy nipples hardened.

Aleksandra then shifted her attention to Linda's head. She pressed gently her ears and nose, turning them smaller and sharper. A soft touch of both eyelids made the eyes grow bigger and brighter like blooming flowers. She grabbed the sides of Linda's face and pushed them until it acquired the shape of a heart, with a dainty pointy chin and a sharp jawline. Finally, she placed her index finger on her lips and watched them grow plump and full, with the soft color of a rosebud.

She realized that the more she modified Linda's body, the easier it became. Now she barely had to touch her for her flesh and bone to yield and warp at her will, but she still enjoyed the tactile experience. She closed her powerful hand around Linda's neck, and finding it too short and thick, squeezed it.

Linda's eyes opened wide full of fear and Aleksandra took a moment to appreciate how beautiful they had become after their recent modification. To maintain the effect, she increased the pressure a little more. Once her aesthetic curiosity was satisfied and Linda's brand-new swan-like neck was complete, she released her grip and patted on her head whispering "You are doing very well, dear" in a soothing tone. Linda was teary-eyed and trembled slightly but managed to muster a weak smile.

Aleksandra's hands then moved to her waist, which she pressed gently, molding it into a narrower, more defined shape. Linda's waist shrank, creating a striking contrast with her round hips, which Aleksandra sculpted into a curvaceous, guitar-like form. The transformation gave Linda a slim silhouette with a tight, elegant core.

Linda's body fat rippled under her skin, shifting towards her breasts and buttocks, which stayed perky despite their increased plumpness. Aleksandra circled Linda's tender nipples with her thumbs, then seized her small breasts and squeezed them carefully, eliciting a soft moan from her.

Her fingers moved with an artistic skill, while her eyes focused intently on Linda's changing form. She massaged her limbs, her touch gentle yet firm. Slowly, Linda's arms and legs elongated, becoming more slender and elegant. Her hands and feet followed suit, the fingers and toes tapering into delicate, graceful shapes.

Aleksandra stared at her creation, a lovely porcelain doll perfect down to the smallest detail. Linda gazed blankly back at her, as if she had suddenly become aware of her massive physique. There was awe in her gaze, and also a blooming, undisguised lust.

"Do you like what you see, dear?", Aleksandra asked as she placed her index finger under Linda's chin, who immediately looked up at her. "Yes, mistress...", she replied nodded slowly, biting her lower lip, while tracing the ridges of Aleksandra's abs with her slender cool hands.

Aleksandra felt a subtle itch just where Linda touched her, radiating from there to the rest of her body, as if some of her new muscle mass recognized its former owner and tried to return to her. She quashed this rebellion within her flesh with a firm wave of self-control. Those muscles belonged to her for all time, like everything else she had gained tonight.

Her attention turned back to Linda, who was running her soft fingers over the veins in her arms with a look of wonder in her face. She was finally perfect, her precious pampered pet. "You have earned a little reward for behaving so well, dear." Aleksandra said as she placed her hand on Linda's head ruffling her jet-black hair softly.

Linda looked at her quizzically, but only got a mysterious smile in return.

Aleksandra took a deep breath to focus herself. Her mastery over Linda's being had become absolute, it would now warp and quiver at her mere thoughts. She projected her mind across her petite body, exploring every curve, every crevice, until she arrived at her tiny clit, barely visible between the lovely folds of her vulva. She began to massage them all, very gently at first, increasing their sensitivity little by little with each loving stroke.

Linda became distracted, her eyelids fluttered and she started squirming in her seat. She opened and closed her eyes, trying to keep her focus. Aleksandra let her lose herself in that haze for a few moments, before hitting her with a quick, piercing orgasm. Linda gasped and her cheeks turned pink. She stared at Aleksandra with wide-open eyes, who looked back at her with a wicked smirk on her lips, before increasing the sensibility of her sex by a tenfold.

Linda's chest began to rise and fall ever so slightly. The breaths were shallow at first, barely perceptible, but they grew stronger, more insistent. Her breathing quickened and tiny pearls of sweat started forming on her forehead.

Her pale face flush with a warm, rosy hue. Her eyes, now tightly closed, fluttered as if caught in a dream, and her full lips parted, releasing the first of many soft moans. Aleksandra found them lovely and decided to turn up the heat a bit.

Linda's breath quickened and her chest heaved up and down in arousal. Her slender hands twitched and then gripped the edges of the table until her knuckles turned white. Her entire body ached with such intense need that she couldn't help rocking her hips and rubbing her thighs together, lost in an overwhelming wave of pleasure.

Aleksandra pushed Linda to the edge of ecstasy only to stop at the last moment, over and over. She played with her for a while, until she was reduced to a quivering, panting, helpless mass of flesh begging for release. Once Aleksandra was sure she couldn't take it anymore, she leaned in close to her ear and whispered.

"Cum."

Linda threw her head back and arched her back with in a spasm as a shrieking moan pushed its way out of her throat, a noise of pure pleasure echoing through the room. Her eyes flew open, wide and unfocused, and she collapsed on the

table like a marionette whose strings had been cut.

She laid face up and very still for a while, her slender ribcage expanding and contracting rhythmically. Aleksandra stood in silence next to her, watching her small, firm breasts rise and fall with her breathing. After some time, Linda came to herself, sat up drowsily and looked around with a dazed expression.

“Enjoying yourself, dear?”, Aleksandra asked with a smirk. Linda nodded wordlessly, her face flushed and her mouth agape, still short of breath. Aleksandra put her thumb on Linda’s chin and pushed her head back slightly, admiring her own creation. “Perfect. Now stand up, dear.” She said, holding out her hand.

Linda took her hand and got up from the table, leaving a wet spot where she had sat. She took her first wobbly steps on her delicate new feet. There was a kind of uncertain grace in her walk, like a newborn fawn, which Aleksandra found charming. “Cover your eyes, and don’t look until I say so.” Linda complied immediately, putting her free hand over her eyes.

As they walked towards the mirrors flanking the door, Linda’s gait grew steadier, but she still tightened her grasp around Aleksandra’s hand, clearly afraid that her new legs and center of gravity may betray her.

Once they were in front of the mirror, Aleksandra took a moment to appreciate how much they had changed. She was now a mighty alabaster giantess and Linda a fine porcelain doll, whose entire body was smaller than one of own her legs. The were alike only in their unnatural paleness and jet black hair.

“You can look now, dear.” Linda did so and let out an uncontrollable cry of surprise at the sight of her own reflection. “Is that... is that me!?” The young woman asked in ecstatic disbelief. Aleksandra came up behind her and put her hands on her slender shoulders, giving her a knowing smile. “I told you I would make you perfect, and I’m a woman of my word.” Linda touched her own face very gently, like she feared she might break it. “I’m so pretty!” Was all she could manage to say in an awed whisper.

Aleksandra’s huge body loomed over her shoulder, staring at her eyes in the reflection of the mirror. “Yes, you are. And if you stay with me, you will be always like this. Would you like that?” She said in a low voice before giving Linda a tender kiss on the side of her neck, never breaking eye contact. The

question was a mere formality, Aleksandra already knew that Linda was hers, forever.

“Yes! Yes! Yes!” The young woman jumped excitedly, her small breasts jiggling up and down. She hugged her mistress’s tree trunk-like torso and planted several quick kisses all over her chiseled abs. Aleksandra couldn’t help but smile at her cheerfulness, feeling also a sudden arousal at the softness of her plump lips on her skin. Linda stretched her slender arms and twirled gracefully like a ballerina, throwing her long black hair and in the air, her gaze fixed on the mirror. Her laughter was like pure spring water, bubbling with joy.

Aleksandra left Linda enthralled by her own reflection and walked towards the large circular table, her mind already made up about how to end such an eventful night. She lay down lazily on the table, which creaked under her massive weight but managed to stay in one piece. Her enormous, impossibly muscular body stretched out across its surface, like mountain ranges of flesh and bone being displaced by tectonic movements.

She half sat up on the table, spread her legs wide and beckoned Linda over to her. “Come here dear, please you mistress.”, she whispered in a husky voice, pointing at her warm, wet sex. Then she lay back down again, clasped her hands behind her neck and stared at the ceiling fresco decorating the dome above. Her eyes met with Fortuna’s blindfolded gaze and her divine court. She saw for the first time the harmony of its composition, and within it, a tacit approval of her ascendancy.

She heard Linda’s eager giggling drawing closer, like the twinkling of tiny bells. Then, the subtle sounds of her petite body climbing onto the table and crawling between her legs, her giggles turning into aroused panting. She felt her small cool hands touching her inner thighs, and almost immediately her plump lips and soft tongue kissing and licking her erect clit.

The woman that once had been Aleksandra Oryolska and now was Madame X closed her eyes and let out a deep sigh of pleasure and relief. She surrendered to the caresses of her delightful creature, letting her mind to idly ponder the inscrutable whims of Lady Luck.

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Roy Ellison writes weirdo erotic fiction. Despite evidence to the contrary, he insists it is about the characters and the plot. He thanks you deeply for your trust and support.

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