

"Get me the flat chisel."

Maia handed it to Pygmalion, and he chipped another fleck out of the marble. With it, a mouth took shape, pristine and delicate.

Privately, Maia thought that sculpting a perfect woman instead of just going out and meeting girls by the communal well like everyone else was weird, but who was she to judge?

Pygmalion always reminded her that assistants don't get paid to have opinions. They don't get written down in history, either.

Pygmalion grunted as another chip cracked off and her left eyelid was finished. She was so close to finished that Maia could almost taste it- a masterpiece, truly, all clean lines and perfect marble. It was completely untouched by human hands (Pygmalion was really weird and specific about it- she'd had to wrap her fingers in silks to brush off dust). Still, there was some warmth in her expression, something in the curve of her eyebrows and angle of her jaw that was desperately, desperately human.

Maia figured he was called a master artisan for a reason.

Finally, Pygmalion stepped back from the statue. Maia thought for a moment he would order her to smash it- he had made her smash several others that had not met his exacting and inscrutable standards. But he simply nodded, first to the statue and then to Maia. She was finally allowed to put away her tools and wash her hands in a bowl of water before retiring to her small room just off of the workshop.

Finishing a statue was satisfying, but not so much as going to bed and having a smoke. While Maia sat and smoked, she stared through a sliver of her doorway at the statue. In the low light of a single lamp, light and shadows flickered across its form, giving the impression of movement.

Pygmalion suddenly appeared and knelt before the statue, bearing a scroll and incense.

Maia jerked with surprise and hissed as embers fell onto her leg. Pygmalion never went to the studio at night; he slept like a rock.

And yet there he was, looking up from the ground to the statue's face. He began murmuring, and Maia strained to hear.

"... of Cyprus, My Lady Aphrodite, I pray, bring to life this perfect woman. Let me know the love of another."

The stone seemed to soften. Maia's lips parted in a gasp. Cheeks flushed and eyes flashed as the statue moved, taking a deep breath and shaking her shoulders as though roused from a deep sleep. She regarded Pygmalion silently.

"Pygmalion," a ringing voice called from high above, "I have heard your prayer and give you Galatea. She shall live as a human woman, brought to life through the strength of your lonely and companionless heart."

Maia would have been offended- she thought of herself as pretty good company- if she was not so shocked. Pygmalion stared at Galatea. She lowered her head and tried to cover herself.

Maia, knowing the piercing nature of Pygmalion's gaze, grabbed her blanket and entered the main studio. Pygmalion startled, having assumed her asleep, and Galatea looked up to meet Maia's gaze.

"Here," she said, holding out the blanket and trying to appear unaffected by Galatea's attention. "We can find you clothes in the morning."

Galatea reached out for the blanket but before she could grasp it-

"No," snarled Pygmalion. "You would cover her divine form with your own ragged blanket? It is sacrilege to offer such a thing."

"Then perhaps she would like it for a bed," Maia suggested.

"She will sleep with me," Pygmalion declared.

Galatea spoke for the first time, in a voice like thunder echoing through a temple.

"I would sleep where I awoke," she said, turning her eyes back to Pygmalion. His jaw tightened and he drew a deep breath, about to argue, but Maia cut in, winking at Galatea.

"Of course, you are still so new to this world. I am sure a moment of solitude would bring it into sharper focus for you."

Pygmalion glared. "Be silent, Maia. You have intruded enough for one night." He turned to Galatea. "I suppose if you prefer this earth floor to my goose down, you may sleep here. Come and join me when you grow weary of denying yourself comfort."

He swept out of the room.

Galatea had a look of shocked indignation that Maia recognized from many a woman who tried to speak with Pygmalion.

"I do not want him," Galatea told her in a low voice. "I will not go."

"He's a fool. You can have my bed," Maia offered. Galatea did not deserve to sleep on cold stone simply because she had standards. She was a person in her own right.

"Only if I will not drive you out," Galatea said, hesitant.

"I will stay as long as you wish me to. Pygmalion need never know."

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Pygmalion was almost as exacting with Galatea as he was with his statues. It was as though she was living art, fed only the smallest bites of the sweetest foods, wearing only the loosest silks, sleeping and waking upon his word.

Maia continued as his assistant, though she was more often left to her own devices. She liked to look busy in front of Galatea and Pygmalion, liked how Galatea's gaze would follow her. She smirked and Galatea blushed.

When he made an especially extreme demand, she and Maia would meet each other's eyes. *He is ridiculous. I wish I could kick him.* They did not speak in his presence.

But at night- when they were free, in the dark of Maia's room with the door closed, they spoke in whispers.

"Do you want one?" Maia would offer, holding out a cigar. Galatea would take it and lean in to light it from the one in Maia's mouth then sigh, relaxing.

"I am hungry enough for a whole loaf of bread," Galatea would confess, and Maia would reveal she had saved her dinner to share between them. The crust was dry but they ate it still, legs pressed together, side by side.

"I hate the way he looks at you," Maia would confess. "As if you are still inanimate."

"I hate it too."

Maia saw what Pygmalion could not; art was plan and design. Women were life and breath and tobacco, nails on skin and blood in a mouth and sweat across strong shoulders, wine-dark waters and opium. Galatea had a beating heart all her own.

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It was a sudden breaking point, but a long time coming.

Late evening, at dinner, Pygmalion sat smoking and drinking. Galatea looked hungry (hungrier each day), and reached for a fig.

Without looking up, Pygmalion growled "No."

Galatea stood. She took the fig and bit into it, with efficient teeth and juice dripping down her chin. Pygmalion turned to her, scowl fixed firmly on his face, and opened his mouth to speak.

"I will eat what I please," Galatea told him. "I am not yours to command."

"*Bitch*," he hissed, "I made you. I knew you before you knew yourself, I am your creator, you were brought to life for me."

"I am not yours," Galatea repeated. "I stopped being yours when I turned from statue to woman."

Pygmalion turned red and sputtered.

Maia smirked and followed as Galatea strode from the room, moving purposefully towards their quarters. Once inside, Maia closed the door behind them. It cast the room in shadow. Galatea was pacing.

"He thinks he can control me," Galatea raged. "He acts as though I am property. I cannot touch you or smoke or drink or cut my hair--"

"We can leave," said Maia impulsively.

Galatea turned. "He would not let me."

"Run away with me, then," Maia whispered, drawing closer.

"Yes," said Galatea immediately. "As long as it's with you." She smiled, reached out, and Maia felt desperately, desperately in love.

They kissed. It was not beautiful or perfect or composed- it was two women in a dark room using their teeth.

When they broke apart, Galatea smiled again. Maia grinned back at her, grabbed stale bread and cigars. Galatea wrapped their worn blanket over her shoulders as though it was a cloak.

Hand in hand, they left. Nobody could stop them.