

The chalk moves like weather when she claps—white flurries bloom, the bitter tang of magnesium sharp on her tongue. Mariia counts because numbers behave when nothing else does. Four in, four out. Board, block, lift, spot.

Tokyo hums around her: announcers stitching names into languages, camera shutters clicking like insects, brass notes drifting from the concourse. The American gymnast steps up—midnight-blue leotard, a star on her chest. She opens her palm to the chalk.

A pale seam cuts its center. A white river.

The lid of Mariia's memory lifts. Coal smoke, whistles, doors banging open. Cold air biting skin. A scarfed stranger's voice urging "Come." Her small body lifted from a train bound for Auschwitz.

"Соколенко," calls a clipped voice. Galina Zorina, Party minder, clipboard in hand, perfume neat as paper. "No wandering. No chatter with foreigners. You know the rules, Masha."

Masha to the team, *Mariia* in records, *Marie* in memory. "I know," she answers.

The American runs, vaults, lands solid. Applause blooms. Mariia dips her hands again, eyes pulled back to the scar. Her heartbeat pounds iron on track.

Coach Irina Belova leans close, smelling of liniment. "Look at me. Ballet arms. Shoulders down. Breathe. You can carry only what fits on the runway."

Mariia runs, hits, flies, sticks. But relief doesn't come. That space is filled by a child's hand and a scar.

Back in line, the American is too near. Chalk haze softens borders. "You did well," Mariia blurts in halting English.

"Thanks." The girl's eyes search her face.

Mariia gestures. "Your hand."

The American opens it. The scar glows.

"Youra," Mariia whispers—their rescuer's name.

The American breathes: "Georges."

Galina steps in. "Time. We don't keep judges waiting."

After, the schedule tightens like wire. Keys vanish, minders linger. A form appears on Mariia's table: *Medical Rest*, waiting for her signature.

Irina intercepts. "She needs ballet," she tells Galina blandly. Later, in the mirrored studio under the stands, she slips a folded note into Mariia's palm.

Interpreter Kenji Sato appears with a clipboard. "Equipment check," he says, leading them through a corridor that smells of rubber and steam.

Anne waits by a vending machine, face lit in blue. For a moment, they are children again under a swaying lamp.

"I think—" Mariia begins.

"I know," Anne says. "I'm Anne."

"Mariia," she answers, hearing the river under ice.

They touch palms. Chalk dust clouds the scar. Together: "Youra."

Kenji coughs. "One minute." They whisper fast—stairs, winters, summers, Pierre. Promises that saved and hurt. Then footsteps. Kenji angles them apart before Galina arrives, smiling like porcelain.

The next day the mixed zone smells of hot cables. Jacques Lemaire, Belgian journalist, steps forward. "One question," he says carefully. "On April nineteenth, 1943—Convoy Twenty—were you aided by Youra Livchitz? I have a note from Pierre."

Kenji translates. Irina stands nearer than protocol. Galina's pen taps.

Mariia tastes metal. This is where lives split. She thinks of vaulting—submit to the floor or it takes you.

"Yes," she says steadily. "His name was Youra Livchitz. A brave man. And my sister and I met here today, at the Games, in peace."

Galina smiles for the cameras. "An anti-fascist memory," she tells the press. "The people's resistance." But the names are out. Names change weather.

Mariia's final vault tastes like clean water. She runs, board thuds, horse answers, air opens. For one heartbeat she is only form and flight. She lets the floor take her. Arms wide. The noise inside her goes quiet.

Anne lands too. No podium will hold them both, not this year. But after the medals, when the crowd thins and evening cools the maples, they find the shrine. The **temizuya** basin whispers, stone wet with memory. Cold water shocks their skin as they wash chalk away.

"Thank you," Mariia whispers—to the man with the scarf, to absent parents, to Pierre who will soon hold two alphabets. Anne nods.

Irina lingers like a shield. Kenji bows and disappears. Jacques will write a restrained story, dates and names, short on adjectives.

Galina files reports, corners sharp, tea cooling. She sleeps knowing order mostly held, though some rain got in.

For Mariia, peace is not a medal on her chest. It is a change of weather beneath her ribs. The past is no longer a box rattling when she runs. It is a river with a name, and she knows where it meets the sea.