

Evil Angel lounged against a Hershey's Kisses lamppost, smirking. "Relax, Maria. He'll get his sugar fix soon enough."

They arrived at the carousel, where lights from hundreds of hand-blown bulbs reflected off brass poles and mirrored panels, piercing the evening mist. Evil Angel released a long, low whistle, his eyebrows raised in grudging admiration.

CJ gestured to the carousel, his voice swelling with pride. "This beauty is a moving piece of our nation's history. Thousands of hours went into hand-carving and painting these horses. Five hundred hand-milled pieces run this masterpiece, and hand-painted Miss Liberties and gilded American Eagles commemorate our victory in WWI."

The carousel's wooden platform creaked beneath their feet as CJ touched a carved horse's mane. "Listen," he whispered. "Every sound tells a story—the craftsmen who carved these horses, the families who've ridden them. Even the squeaks have history."

As Raisa circled the platform, she ran her fingers over the glazed black mane of a galloping circus jumper. The stallion's muscles gleamed under the carousel lights, its tail streaming behind like a banner—a frozen moment of equine grace. Its circus-themed saddle blanket was fringed in bright yellow and adorned with stars and stripes. Its mouth gaped, as if gasping for air.

CJ pointed out the hand-painted murals by post-war European artisans: Rotterdam's bustling port and Bavaria's idyllic landscapes—snapshots of a world forever changed. His voice carried the pride of twenty years of stewardship.

Evil Angel rolled his eyes. "Here comes another history lesson."

"The artists painted scenes inspired by their homelands: a mother and child, a man with his ladylove, a Bavarian family, and a matador in a bullfight. With twenty mirrored panels and a thousand hand-blown light bulbs, the designer spared no expense."

CJ shook his head. "Today's merry-go-rounds are made of aluminum and plastic. Beauty nourishes the soul; expediency breeds indifference. For most visitors, it's just another ride."

Raisa and Stallion studied each panel, pointing out the historical details as if they were in a living museum.

As they approached a Wurlitzer organ, CJ's eyes sparkled with excitement. "This handcrafted, self-playing machine is one of only a few military band organs powered by a hidden steam engine."

"It's a Wurlitzer with a hundred and sixty-four pipes, fifty-four keys,

sixteen bells, a trombone, trumpet, violin, and cello, plus a glockenspiel and wooden flute—rich, like an orchestra. You can't replicate its sound with a synthesizer."

The Wurlitzer's brass pipes gleamed like a miniature cathedral organ under the carnival lights. "They stopped making these in the '50s—modern rides play CDs."

Stallion lifted Raisa onto her circus horse, his hands lingering on her waist as he stood beside her.

As steam hissed from the pipes, the first notes of a Parisian-themed waltz, "Ekaterina," floated out—first violin, then piano, and finally the whole orchestra. The mechanical heart of the carousel ticked beneath their feet, counting down to magic.¹⁴

Raisa's circus-trained balance found its rhythm as the carousel stirred to life—the jumper rising and falling in perfect tempo. With her red heels resting in the stirrups, Raisa recalled a creaky old metal carousel horse in Leningrad. Nothing was as extravagant as this. She hummed along with the melancholy tune, Stallion feeding off her smile.

After several turns, the Wurlitzer picked up the tempo with Shostakovich's Second Waltz, and Raisa's horse cranked up and down in a faster gallop. She remembered dancing this Russian waltz in circus school.

Raisa looked down at Stallion's dark, wavy hair and up at his broad chest as her steed pumped up and down. Their eyes locked. Swaying with one hand on the saddle and the other on the horse's neck, Stallion enjoyed the Russian waltz, though he preferred the Viennese.¹⁵

The Wurlitzer shifted from Shostakovich to Strauss, its steam-powered valves opening like mechanical lungs. The "Voices of Spring" filled the night air.¹⁶



¹⁴ Listen to "Carousels (a French Waltz)", from composer and artist Ekaterina. Scan or visit: <https://bimbombookclub.com/Ekaterina-Carousels-French-Waltz>



¹⁵ Listen to the "Suite for Jazz Orchestra No. 2" by Dmitri Shostakovich. Scan or visit: <https://bimbombookclub.com/dmitri-shostakovich-waltz-no-2>

As the tempo quickened, Raisa's horse pumped faster, and her fingers tightened around the brass shaft as her horse rose and fell. Stallion recognized the "Voices of Spring" and could no longer remain idle. His hands found Raisa's waist, and he swung her side-saddle and lifted her from the horse to the carousel's edge.

Muscle memory took over: his right hand grasped her left, their fingers intertwined, her hand curling over his shoulder. With his free hand on her back, he led her into a waltz. Raisa's spine straightened, each instrument joining the symphony like another dancer entering their spinning world. The Viennese tempo spun them outward as the carousel sped up.

They swung gracefully in swift circles against the carousel's rotation, defying physics with every spin. The platform's momentum battled their steps, threatening to hurl them outward as they twirled inward. Laughing breathlessly, their hearts pounded as they resisted the carousel's centrifugal force. Their synchronized steps kept them balanced on the edge of a spinning world, aware that any movement could fling them off the ride.

Each turn showcased years of dance training: her flawless arabesque, his confident lead, their shared rhythm. Their bodies remembered steps learned in different worlds—his in UCLA's dance studio, hers in Moscow's circus school.

Evil Angel conducted an invisible orchestra while Good Angel desperately clung to the brass pole, her apron fluttering, muttering Italian prayers.

Beneath the platform, hand-milled gears meshed, their precision concealed by carved panels. Each revolution sent the dancers gliding past mirrors, their reflections multiplying into infinity. The hand-blown bulbs illuminated their dance in amber and gold, while starlight glimmered in the horse's glass eyes.

As the gears clicked faster, their waltz matched the acceleration—one-two-three, one-two-three—until the painted horses and chariots blurred into streaks of gold and crimson, galloping at Cupid's hand. Keeping pace, Stallion and Raisa moved with a precision that only trained bodies could achieve.



¹⁶ Listen to "Voices of Spring Waltz" composed by Johann Strauss
Scan or visit: <https://bimbombookclub.com/voices-of-spring-johann-strauss>

The world contracted to essential points—her hand in his, shared breath, perfect timing. Their finesse showed in every effortless turn. Everything else faded, disappearing into their locked gazes.

Memories flickered through Raisa's mind—rigorous training, the thrill of dancing to forbidden Western records. But this was a magic she had never known: raw and free, unfettered by state-approved choreography.

Evil Angel marveled at how one would be flung off the ride if the other let go. He clipped his cigar: "An unusual predicament for a budding relationship—let alone a first date." Nothing he said could distress Good Angel—she was enchanted, dabbing the corner of her apron against her teary eyes.

Steam rose from the Wurlitzer as the last notes of Strauss lingered. The carousel's spin slowed like a music box winding down. Evil Angel straightened his tie; Good Angel blew into her hanky, while dust motes danced in the soft light.

Still immersed in the waltz's rhythm, Raisa's red heels found solid ground as Stallion's hands steadied her waist.

As they caught their breath, CJ led them on, his voice softening. "Back then, the waltz shocked society—it was the first dance where men and women held hands. They called it The Forbidden Dance. Churches condemned it as sinful. Religious zealots threatened composers and instructors with death."

"The *Times of London* wrote, 'The waltz involves the voluptuous intertwining of limbs and close compression of bodies, in ungodly violation of ladies' decency and morals.' Fathers were warned against exposing their daughters to such a contagion. In the end, though, the teenagers won the day."

Evil Angel tugged on Good Angel's apron. "Wasn't that what happened to Elvis?"

CJ shook his head in admiration. "Wow! I think you both deserve some chocolate. Follow me to Hershey heaven."

Night settled deeper over the park. The string lights cast warm pools of light, while shadows thickened between them as they headed to the Chocolate Emporium. A breeze carried the sweetness of chocolate and candy floss from nearby confectionery tents.

CJ led them beneath a massive neon sign that flashed: 'Hershey's Chocolate Emporium.'

The emporium rose before them like a temple of chocolate. Raisa's eyes widened as she took in the lavish displays, a stark contrast to the bare shelves and endless queues of Moscow's government-run stores.

Floor-to-ceiling candy chutes dispensed bite-sized samples—Kit Kats,