

Bondage Betrayal

by Lila Dubois

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Blurb

Five years ago a terrible betrayal tore Roman and Savannah apart. Roman's burgeoning interest in the world of BDSM and his desire to master Savannah lead them deep into the heart of sexual fetish. A weekend away at the house of a high powered Dom was supposed to be the next step in their

exploration of their Dominant/submissive relationship, but when their host convinces Roman to turn Savannah over to him for training, their love is stretched beyond the breaking point. Savannah, believing that Roman has given her away forever, flees, but not before suffering at the hands of the sadistic Dom. Roman knows nothing of what she's suffered, and believes Savannah left him because of his desires.

When they meet again five years later will the lies that separate them keep them apart, or will remembered love be enough to bring them back together?

WARNING: Title Contains: Bondage, Domination, Restrains, Spanking, Oral, Anal, Clamps

Chapter One

The room held its breath. Reactions were as varied and wide-ranging as the observers. The watchers tried to be silent but each sharp crack would elicit a small flurry of sound: a sharp gasp from an elegant blonde curled on the floor; a high pitched moan of pleasure and longing from a brunette strapped to the wall, his torso crisscrossed with chain; guttural sound of fear from a mousy dishwater blonde who had curled herself around and between the legs of her Master, who sat stiff and watchful in the chair above her. For the most part the Dominants in the room were silent, the few sounds that were made coming from the submissive men and women who were with them.

There were varying degrees of understanding among the Dominants in the room as to what exactly was happening on the central raised platform. For the beginners, it seemed to be a harsh game, more severe than most, but consenting Dominance and submission play, a passion for which united all those in the large room. Those with more experienced eyes knew it was consensual but far from safe.

The sub was a laughing, gentle man in his life outside the chains, with a mature, open face, and a body still thick with muscle, but beginning to show some middle-aged padding. The extra flesh probably saved him from further true harm. A likeable guy with deep-seated submissive sexual tendencies, he was familiar to most in the small community.

The woman however ... she was an unknown.

His body was spread in the classic X, chains to the ceiling and floor holding the leather cuffs so that every inch of his body was accessible to her.

There had been silence for several minutes, no stroke falling over his defenseless flesh. The pause in activity may have caused some to think that it was over, but most knew better. Expectation was thick in the air, flavored copper like blood, seeping into those who watched, mingling with their fear, their desire.

She had been motionless, standing to one side and behind. Now she turned and began to move. She was a predator, her movements sharp but controlled. Most dominants moved slowly, surely, as if showing the world with the measured movements how in control they were, but not her. She stalked around him, her body wrapped in the classic black body suit, but instead of shiny cheap vinyl hers was muted, clearly leather and most likely custom made. There was elaborate stitching, black on black; a vaguely Celtic pattern started on each shoulder, moved down over her breasts, and then parted to continue down her hips and the outsides of her thighs.

A leather and lace mask covered the upper part of her face. Starting from her hairline, it covered her brow, nose, and upper cheeks, the leather then giving way to lace that lay close against her cheeks in line with her lips. Unlike the catsuit that molded her curves, the mask sparkled, jet and crystal beads worked into the lace where it was darted into the leather. It drew the eye, causing the viewer to crave the answers the mask hid.

Some, those who had had the privilege to see her up close, would know that there was a teardrop crafted in crystal beads under one eye. The contradiction, the complication, was compelling, and frightening.

"Slave." Her voice was low, smooth, but thrumming with power, tension, her concentration, her being, clearly centered on the sub before her.

"Yes, Mistress."

The blow she landed with the cane was sudden, unexpected. The rattan cane, stained dark brown, was a blur as it arched up from below, striking the inside of the sub's left thigh. His cry was sharp, desperate, his back arching before he hunched back in on himself.

"Do you want to know why I did that slave? Do you wish to know what you did to deserve such harsh treatment?"

"Yes Mistress ... please ... tell me so that I might not do it..."

His plea was cut short when she gave him a matching welt on the inside of the right thigh.

"I will not tell you."

The tip of the cane traced his chest, following the pattern of the stripes she had already laid.

She took a step closer to him, taking his left nipple between her finger and thumb.

"Offer me something slave, try to please me."

"Mistress, whatever you want is yours to take."

She twisted the nipple, his breath hissing through his teeth.

"But I want you to offer something to me. What do you think will please me?"

Those who had a view of the front could see the poor man blinking furiously, his breathing fast and uneven.

"Mistress, if it pleases you, you have not touched my cock."

She twisted the nipple harder, wringing another cry. "Are you, slave, asking me to suck your cock? You think so highly of yourself and so little of me?"

"No! No! No! I offer it for your pleasure, whatever it may be."

Without another word she stepped back, moving to a small rolling case which rested on the floor near the platform. There were gasps as those closest saw what she brought out. The rest of the room waited, breathless.

Standing once again before the naked man, the Dom lifted the cane.

"Open your mouth, slave." Instantly his lips and teeth parted. She placed the cane between his teeth, whispering, "Bite."

The watchers were left to wonder at the sub's thoughts. What did it do to him to hold his instrument of torture in his mouth? Could he taste his own flesh upon it?

Gloved fingers took the man's genitals in hand, gathering his semi-erect cock and balls together, squeezing and manipulating the flesh until she was able to wrap her fingers around the base, pulling both cock and balls away from his body. His small sounds were muffled against the cane. With her other hand she carefully wrapped a cock strap, studded with inward facing spikes, around his genitals.

Ten spikes, tips sharp, but not enough to draw blood, each over an inch long, were forced against his soft skin as she fastened the strap. When she stepped back, everyone could clearly see the silver held in place by the leather circle. A terrible cry echoed through the room as she released her hold on his cock and balls, allowing them to take the full impact of the device.

The savagery of the item was beautiful and terrible. The sub's eyes were on the horizon, the cane still in his teeth. His breath whistled around the piece of rattan.

She took the cane from his teeth, "Look down, slave. See what I have done for you."

The man dropped his head to his chest, a sob coming from between his teeth at the sight of his tortured cock.

"Where does it hurt, slave? Tell me."

She stood back, her eyes never leaving the bound man so helplessly in her charge.

"My ... my cock, I can feel the spikes, digging in, they're sharp. And my balls, oh God--my balls."

"Is the pain more or less than in your cock?"

"More, more, more, oh God, the weight is pushing my balls onto them. It ... it ... hurts."

"I want it to hurt. I want you to hurt."

"Yes Mistress." The words were a plea.

She raised the cane and added a stripe to his chest. His body bowed, adding pressure to his cock in its painful mooring.

Her own breath was labored now. She began to circle him, the cane adding a stripe to his body every few steps.

"We are near the end now, slave. So close. You're deep, so deep. I have brought you here, someplace you could never go on your own, never be taken with love or kindness or games." A welt to the outside of his thigh, right ass cheek, left shoulder.

"Do you think you have pleased me? Do you? Have you considered the possibility that you haven't? What if none of this will ever be enough? What if all the lashings, the debasement, will not bring you low enough for me?" More welts, now to the other ass cheek, thigh, and the soft flesh covering his left tricep.

"God, please..."

"God cannot help you, I'm afraid he never comes here." She was at his front again, her right hand cruelly twisting one nipple.

"But you have a secret don't you, slave, a deep secret. It is not God who could rescue you, but someone else. Someone in this room." His eyes moved over her shoulder to someone behind her.

"That's right. She loves you still, and so you are safe, forever safe." Stepping close, she whispered into his ear, "And I hate you for that, and I will punish you for it."

Reaching down she grabbed the leather strap and lifted, the spikes digging into his balls. He screamed, not merely a cry, but a true scream. Around the room people jumped, some of the Doms moving as if they would interfere, but no one did.

"Beg me for more!"

The words were ragged, raw, his vocal cords strained. "Please--please--please Mistress, use me ... more ... more ... more, ah God, it hurts."

She pinched a fold in the leather drawing the spikes on the sides in. Another scream followed.

"Beg."

"Please Mistress more, I beg you, more, more, more. Use me, use me, use me."

"Offer yourself up."

"My ... my body ... is yours."

"And what of your soul, your mind, your heart? Can you feel me there too, pressing hurting, squeezing?"

"Yes... I will never, never, never forget ... forget."

"And you will never be the same."

With a vicious twist she released the leather so that the strap fell away, the spikes pulling from the grooves they had dug in his flesh. The returning blood caused pain so deep he threw his body back, his mouth open but no sound emerging.

He was brought back as she viciously caned his ass, then spanked his throbbing genitals. His body was alive, aware, every nerve ending on fire so that the air itself was a torture.

Ten times more she caned his ass, the blows quickly followed by spanks to his cock and balls, some straight on, some coming from beneath to bruise and abuse his sac. They were both in a frenzy, his body arched in a bow, every muscle defined, she a controlled fury, savage and cruel.

She stopped. Faced him. "Slave, what do you need?"

"The spikes, the spikes, please put them back ... oh God please!"

"You cannot have them. What else?"

"Please, please, don't stop caning me... Just a few more ... please, please."

"Where, where do you need them?"

"All the soft places, my ass, yes please ... my ass, and my nipples, right across them please, *please, please*. And balls, cane them, cane them."

"What if I break you, so no other can have you?"

"Oh God, oh God, please, do not stop."

His words echoed in the cavern. He was gone, lost in sub-space, so far into the world of darkness there was no light. And she had taken him there, simply, easily.

Her voice was low now, just for him. "I will touch you once more, and only once. Your body and mind are fractured now, but you will survive. I will let you down and your mistress, your wife, will take you home and care for you, and you will love her all the more for having danced on the edge.

"Know what good fortune you have that there is someone to care for you now. When I release you and walk away I will forget you."

Her voice was hard, cruel, cutting him in ways and places that a knife could not reach. His body and mind warred between his insane and desperate need for more of her dark attention and the haven of the arms of someone who loved him.

As he shook in his bonds, his mind at war, his body foolishly straining towards her, she turned, sweeping the room with her gaze.

Let them feel true fear, true pain, and appreciate what they have all the more, she thought. *Let them see what it is to truly need to punish, to need to inflict pain rather than simply using it to express desire.*

When all had felt the soulless weight of her gaze she turned back to her broken partner. In this dark moment her heart died a little--as it always did. Horror began to seep into her consciousness, easing the fog of rage that motivated her.

It was this damnable weakening, this traitorous softness in her--when she knew the world had no softness to give her in return--that made this last blow the most horrible, the darkest. She did not temper the blow. Pulling back the cane she brought it forward with stunning force, cutting a line just above his cock, catching the root of it where it met his belly. For a moment a white line blossomed there, straight and sure across his body. In the next breath, white morphed to red, horrible red, pain red.

And in a room that echoed with the sound of the crack there was silence, until he threw his head back, his scream at once hopeless and beautiful. Blood began to seep from the mark of the cane.

Stepping close once more she pressed her fingers against the raw flesh and leaning in whispered, "Forgive me."

She strode from the room, scooping up the pack as she went, and was gone.

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Chapter Two

Savannah dipped her sponge into the cloudy water and carefully lowered her arm into the well of the vase she was throwing.

In her mind's eye, she could see it, a thin-walled straight-sided pot, awash in bold colors. She drew her fingers up, using slight inward pressure to counteract the outward force the wheel.

She took her foot off the pedal and the vase slowed to a stop.

Reaching around, she used a wire to slice cleanly through the base where it was attached to the wheel, and then rose. The piece was still too wet to be moved.

Her arms were wet with clay to her elbows. Moving to the large industrial sink she turned on the faucet before plunging her arms into the cool water. The shorts she wore, purchased in the boys section because they were the only kind that came equipped with enough handy pockets, buckles, and flaps, hung low on her hips, emphasizing rather than disguising the femininity of her body.

Casually wiping her arms against her clothing to dry them, Savannah left the concrete-floored pottery room with its high industrial ventilation ducts and entered the airier painter's studio.

"Chelle! Where are you?"

Immediately a dark brown head peaked up from behind an easel in the corner of the room. "Hi. You done already?"

"Yep," Savannah said, wandering over. "I think that this might be the final piece for this series, I have a good feeling about this one."

"I wouldn't be surprised," Michelle said, her attention on her canvas. Unlike Savannah, who needed silence to work, Michelle was able to talk at the same time, "Since you came back your stuff has been amazing, like totally amazing. I mean wherever you go I think it might be, like something in the water. You could probably bottle it and sell it and make, like, a million dollars. Not that you need to because you already like, make that as an artist, which is amazing anyway. Um, where was I going with this?"

"I have no idea." Savannah said with a smile. Michelle was a sort of apprentice, as well as a friend. Though only five years apart in age, Savannah felt 20 years older than the younger woman.

Bright and cheerful Michelle's personality was only a thin veneer for her raw passion. She had the makings of a truly important artist. As scattered as her speeches could sometimes be, Michelle had hit on one very important truth.

Savannah's work had been much better since she came back. Her demons exorcised, for now, her heart was able to follow the light to brighter side of life and express that in her work.

Amazing what a three day sadism binge with a 20 hour session as a Dominatrix could do for a girl's mental health.

"Little mental health breaks are good," she told Michelle. Michelle looked up from her painting, but, uncharacteristically, didn't comment. She knew from past experience that Savannah wouldn't talk about where she'd gone or what she'd done while away.

"So you're finished with that piece?" Michelle asked instead.

"I think that's the last one," Savannah said. She went to her sketch area, a bright corner of the painting studio, and picked up the sketch she'd done for the series. The pot she'd just thrown was commissioned. An office building in DC was redecorating their lobby and the space they wanted to fill was an odd one—a long narrow ledge twenty feet above the reception desk in the three story open lobby.

Savannah had designed a series of thrown vases. The shapes and heights varied, so that when the pots were placed in a line the profiles would flow smoothly from one to the other, the colors moving from cream to turquoise, dark blue in the center, and fading to Kerry and pastel green.

The drawing she held showed a sketch of the completed idea. When the piece was done, this signed drawing, which she'd hand-carried to the interior designer's office in DC, would be framed and hung in the lobby.

Though she'd thrown the last pot, she was far from done. She had to fire that pot, finish painting and second firing several others, and box them up and drive them the almost six hundred miles from Savannah, Georgia to DC.

"Are you sad it's done?" Michelle said. She'd risen from her easel and was cleaning her hands with a cloth.

"A little," she said, setting down the drawing. "But there's always another project."

"When are you going to Chicago?"

"Next week. The sketches are done. I'm really looking forward to this one, so I hope they like the drawing." Savannah pulled up a sketch she'd done in charcoal. It was a pair of lovers, wrapped around each other, bodies contorted to the point of surrealism. She'd drawn inspiration from Rodin's marble sculptures for the positioning. The building she was designing it for had an entirely black marble lobby. When the interior designer contacted her, he said the client wanted something visceral, that would cause controversy and drawn forth emotions.

For Savannah there was nothing more visceral and emotional than love, or the illusion of it.

If the client liked the piece she'd sculpt it, larger than life size, from clay and plaster, then have it cast in bronze or copper, to complement the black marble of the lobby. It was an expansive project, one she desperately wanted, as most of her commissioned pieces were not nearly as evocative and interesting as this.

Plus the fifty thousand dollar price tag, plus five grand for materials, was very attractive.

Roman tapped the edge of his headset, which was buzzing discreetly, indicating an incoming call. "Roman," he said smoothly.

"Roman, it's Peter, I just wanted to check that we were still on for lunch tomorrow."

"Of course," Roman said, leaning back in his chair. Normally he would expect his secretary to confirm these details, but Peter was a solid business acquaintance. Almost a friend.

"Good, good. It will be nice to see your sunny, smiling face," Peter said.

Roman let out a bark of laughter, one side of his mouth twitching in what passed for a smile. "Tomorrow then. No business talk. I promise."

"No, no business talk. Not as long as you insist on buying those disgusting residential properties."

"Tomorrow," Roman said, not willing to honor Peter's lame joke with a second laugh. One was enough for this conversation.

He tapped his headset again and ended the call. He actually was looking forward to lunch tomorrow. Peter owned a commercial design firm. For years he'd been Roman's go-to man for renovating office spaces bought as part of his real estate development firm.

Appearances could be everything in business, and companies were willing to pay top dollar to rent or purchase buildings that were state of the art and beautiful. Roman and Peter were both tapping into this, though in different ways.

It was five o'clock, and Roman's secretary, a thin blond man, ducked into the office to see if there was anything Roman needed. There wasn't, and his secretary ducked out again.

Around him his office went quiet. He ran his empire from a small suite of offices in one of the first commercial buildings he'd bought in Chicago. No penthouse suites here: he reserved that for the rent-paying clients. His office was on the fifth floor, with a view of the building next door.

There were showcases spaced in other buildings he used, but this was a place for work, the place he was the most comfortable.

As the lights in the outer office clicked off and the sunlight faded, Roman turned on his desk lamp and kept working.

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Chapter Three

So much for getting away from the humidity.

Savannah shrugged out of her tailored jacket, throwing it over her arm. It had been a muggy July day in Savannah, the air so thick you could practically eat it, and Chicago seemed to be no different.

She passed a tourist stand offering the *Ferris Bueller* tour of Chicago, and headed towards the short man with a heavy mustache who carried a placard with 'Savannah Jones,' written on it in blocky letters.

"Hello," she said. "I'm Savannah."

He smiled wide, "Hello there, Ms. Jones. Great accent."

Savannah offered him a brief smile, inwardly amused. Apparently Yankees really did love a southern accent.

He led her to a Lincoln Town Car, air-conditioned to near arctic cool. Savannah was instantly grateful that she'd accepted the designer's offer of a ride. She hadn't let him buy her plane ticket, though a business class ticket would have been nice rather than the on-sale coach one she'd bought herself, but she wasn't comfortable owing the designer that much.

The driver's jacket had a company logo on the pocket, meaning he was from a car rental service rather than a personal employee of the firm. No need to pump him for information.

Her driver had tucked Savannah's small carry-on bag into the trunk, but she had her portfolio of sketches with her. She flipped it open, going through the sketches, in the charcoal protected by plastic sheets. She rehearsed her description of the creative process, including snippets about Rodin and his influence, the impact of metal sculpture, and the details of the production process.

Details and factoids about the art, and the artist, were usually as valuable to the designer and client as the piece itself. They wanted to be able to walk through their impressive building, point at a piece, and tell people, "You know, the artist, whom I met, drew her inspiration from Rodin..."

Forty minutes later she was seated at a conference table with Peter, the designer. He was on the third page of the folio, and Savannah was already sure she'd gotten the job. He had some pictures of the lobby of the building, which was nearly finished with renovations, her piece was perfect for the space.

Peter reached the end of the book, flipped back to the first page, and smiled. "I love it."

Savannah gave him a slight smile in return. "Thank you. After looking at the photos I really think the piece is going to enhance the space."

Peter checked his watch. "My client was planning to join us. If you don't mind I'd like to give him a few minutes."

"That's fine by me," she said.

"If you'll excuse me."

Peter left the room, presumably to check in with his client. Aware of the large glass wall at her back, Savannah didn't relax back into her chair. The deal wasn't final, but she was damn sure she was going to get the job. She tipped her head to look at her sketch, not with a business eye, but an artistic one.

The man was down on one knee, bent forward to kiss the woman, who lay on her back, draped over a rock. Her body was arched back, her breasts in distinct profile. One of the man's hands was on her hip, the other rested on his thigh, a dagger clenched in his hand.

The woman's arms lay alongside the bolder, they were flexed, her arms caught in restraints anchored to the rock.

There was much of her in this piece.

Savannah looked away, out the window, and fought to swallow the dark that rose within her. Not now, not here. There was no outlet for the terrible rage in this brightly lit office space.

She'd sketched this piece, conceived it, just before she went away. She'd been in one of her dark moments, unable to escape her ghosts. She'd knelt on the floor of her studio, hands clenching her head as she screamed. She'd screamed until she was hoarse, then she'd sketched, coal-dusted hands flying over white paper, dirtying it with the darkness inside her.

Savannah could feel sweat forming on her lower back. She wanted to get out of here.

Pull yourself together.

She closed her eyes and brought up a vision of the ocean. Vast, timeless, the deepest grey-blue: her refuge. It was not the temperamental Atlantic she pictured, but the endless Pacific.

The conference room door opened and Savannah opened her eyes.

"Sorry about this. My client's in a meeting, and his secretary doesn't have a good guess as to when he'll be out. Are you going to be in town for a few days?"

"Overnight."

Peter took his seat and set a pad and pen down. "I know he isn't available tomorrow. Well then, why don't you tell me a little about yourself, and your

process?"

"I was inspired by Rodin. The exaggerated positioning of the bodies, and the hints of details, are some of the more distinctive..."

An hour later, signed contract in hand, Savannah left the conference room. She was elated to have landed this job, not just for the money, but because it was an interesting project. And maybe making this piece would hold some of her ghosts at bay for a few months.

She'd left the majority of the sketches with Peter so he could show his client. She had three with her, each showing a different angle of the sketch and bearing Peter's initials.

She slipped the sketches into her bag as she crossed the lobby. She looked up, scanning for the driver, who Peter had arranged to have taken her to her hotel.

A tall man, shoulders broad in a grey suit jacket, walked past. His tightly curled chestnut hair, glinted in the sunlight. Savannah stopped mid-stride, her breath caught in a painful gasp. She turned to watch the man disappear into the elevator.

Turn. Turn around. Show me your face.

He slid into an elevator as the doors were closing. She didn't see his face.

Savannah stood rooted where she'd stopped. Her hands were shaking, her fingers ice cold.

Someone I used to know

Savannah pulled herself together and exited the lobby. The driver was waiting there, leaning against the car smoking a cigarette, which he stubbed out as she approached.

Used to know

Though really, she'd never known him at all. If she had, she might have been able to protect herself. Instead she'd succumbed to a brilliant smile, laughing eyes, and chestnut curls.

It was the sketches. They'd made her think about him, and because she'd been thinking of him she'd imagined she saw him. He hadn't been there. He was in California, or Hell. As far as she was concerned they were the same place.

The darkness she'd tamped down was rising again. Savannah pulled a notebook from her purse and flipped it open. She needed an outlet, though it had only been a few weeks since her last exorcism. With a grimace she pulled out her cell phone and dialed the number.

Roman slid into the elevator. He shook his wrist and looked at his watch, grimacing. He hated being late. The day had devolved into a total disaster. He'd spent the morning having a building inspector tell him that the residential building he was in escrow on had severe electrical problems.

He was beyond late for this meeting, and with everything else he had to do today he would have preferred to skip it. But the devil was in the details, and the Fennelin Building was such a huge investment that he couldn't afford to overlook anything. The art in the lobby was as important as the type of marble he'd laid on the floor and security system he was installing.

Commercial leasing was a tough business. There was money to be made, but companies looking to lease had plenty of options. If name companies were going to choose your space, it had to be exceptional. He needed Fennelin to turn a profit if he was going to continue in business.

He stepped off the elevator. Peter was standing at the reception desk, conferring with a colleague who held a design panel in one hand. He looked up as Roman stepped off the elevator and waved away the designer.

"Roman," he said, walking forward, hand extended, "glad you could make it."

"I'm late."

"I noticed."

"The artist is gone?"

"I sent her back to the hotel. I have all the details, and she's sending over some written stuff. I'll have my office work it up for you."

"Sketches?"

"Come in to the conference room. Have you eaten lunch?"

"No," Roman said, the corner of his mouth kicking up.

"Sarah, will you get us some sandwiches?"

Peter led him into the conference room. Roman looked around, admiring the space. Peter's office was, of course, in one of his buildings. Peter had done an exceptional job with his suite of offices, making sure that they were a working example of his skill.

He'd updated them several times, making sure the decor never got dated. This building was probably due for a basic renovation--carpet, paint--but it would have to wait.

Shaking his head, he took a seat. He had enough going on without worrying about updating a building that was in working order. After the residential properties turned a profit...

"Did we find it?" he asked Peter as a young man wheeled a cart into the conference room.

Peter held his gaze in a long look, then grinned, "Definitely."

"Good," Roman relaxed slightly. Another piece of this project checked off.

The young man set sandwiches, bags of chips, and cups of fruit in front of each man along with a bottle of sparkling water.

Roman unwrapped his sandwich, only then realizing how hungry he was. He rarely remembered to eat. There was a time when he would have been like Peter--smugly aware of hole-in-the wall cheap eats, and excited to go out and try new food, desirous of turning each meal out into an event.

Those days were gone, as was the woman who'd sat across from him.

He ate in silence, filling his body but taking no real pleasure in the food.

When he was done he dusted off his hands and leaned back. This unexpected break in the day wasn't helping his schedule, but Roman was realistic enough to know when he needed to take some downtime. That was over; it was time to work.

"What can you show me?"

Peter pushed away their wrappers and pulled out a black artist's portfolio. Peter tensed for a moment, then forced himself to relax.

"You're going to love this. The artist came highly recommended, and she's done commercial pieces before--mostly in the South--but still she'll understand our schedule and won't pull any artistic license crap."

He flipped it open to the first image and pushed it over to Roman.

"It'll be controversial, there's no doubt about it, but I think that means we can get some coverage--"

Roman lost the rest of what Peter said. He couldn't hear him over the ringing in his ears.

The lovers were close, bodies flowing together. He above her, unquestionably mastering her, she submissive and bowed before him. The lines of their bodies were clear and sharp, as were the details of her hair, which was straight as rain. Her face was only a shadow of features, while his was sharp and distinct, with a strong jaw, large nose, and forbidding brow.

Roman turned the page. From here you could see the man's hand, the hilt of the dagger it held. Both his hand and the weapon were only hinted at, not defined as the man's face was, but there was no mistaking what he held.

He flipped the page. Now the other side-view of the pair. Here the details of the cuff around her wrist, the straining of her arm, were visible.

He hated it, hated everything about it. What it showed, what the shadowy menace implied, was wrong. Maybe if her face was visible, if the sweet submission and deep pleasure required of a submissive were visible on her features...

"My favorite part," Peter said, unaware of Roman's absorption, "is that the guy looks like you."

Roman looked up sharply then flipped through the images until he arrived at one that showed the man's face clearly.

There was his nose, his brow. The man shown here was younger than he was, the corners of his eyes and around his mouth smooth. It was his face but younger, happier, before soul-deep grief had marked it.

It was him, five years ago.

Memory rose, quick and wild as a butterfly. He saw himself, naked from the waist up, the upper half of his wetsuit dangling around his legs as he hopped out of the car. He stood on the doorframe to un-strap his board from the roof and a pair of long fingered hands rubbed his thighs, reaching around to squeeze his butt. He looked down to see her still seated in the car. She wore sunglasses and a ridiculous hat. Her heavy bag full of sketching materials was on her lap. She grinned at him, her lips full and glossy. Her skin was beautiful cream, thanks to the hat that protected her from the sun. His Georgia peach.

Heart beating fast, Roman forced the memory down and turned to the image of the woman. Did he recognize her? There wasn't enough of her face to be sure, but the long fall of rain-straight hair could be her.

"The artist," Roman said, voice hoarse, "is a woman?"

"Yes, beautiful too. Savannah. Savannah Jones."

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Chapter Four

Savannah pulled the black cat suit out of her bag. Sitting on the side of the bed in her generic hotel room she cursed herself for bringing it. If she didn't have it with her she wouldn't be able to go to one of Chicago's notorious BDSM clubs. Instead she would have had to lie here, order room service, and watch TV.

That sounded lovely. A night away from her studio so she couldn't feel guilty for not working. A night to take in a bad made-for-TV movie while indulging with fries and a burger.

But if she spent her evening that way, she would never sleep, haunted by the ghost of a young man and woman she'd once known.

To test herself, Savannah stuffed the cat-suit back into the bag and lay down on the bed. She turned the TV on, volume up, and tried to relax.

Car insurance, window cleaner, grocery store, ads flashed on the screen.

A brightly lit loft, near the beach. The roof sloped, skylights meeting the floor-to-ceiling windows so there was a seemingly endless expanse of glass. It let in the light from the West, from the beach. If she stood on a chair she could see the water over the roofs of the houses that stood between her and the water. There were boats too, their pointy-tipped masts creating a webbing of wood and rope that obscured her view but she could see it.

He'd bought it for her, bought her the light that streamed, golden and wonderful, into the room, warming the wood floors and her toes.

No, no, no. Watch the TV.

A sitcom about a family with some improbable quirk came on. Savannah tried to concentrate on the plot.

She sat before an easel in the bright light, a ragged bit of canvas carefully placed beneath it to catch flying flecks of paint. She couldn't have a potter's wheel in here, but there was a co-op not far away with wheels and two badly dilapidated kilns.

She was happy, blissfully so. She painted scenes of red and purple, lovers dancing in the dark. She used a single swipe of precious cerulean to highlight the woman's dress.

The door opened. He was home.

She jumped from her easel, the work she'd devoted the past week to forgotten. She skipped to the door, throwing herself into his arms. If she got paint on his suit they didn't care. If his briefcase scuffed the floor as he dropped it, they didn't notice. There was nothing and no one else in the whole of the world.

Their friends said there were too old to behave like high schoolers in love—they were 25, they should be more dignified—but they didn't care. He was her prince, her beloved. She dug her fingers into his chestnut curls as he pressed her against the wall.

"Play?" he asked, his eyes promising dark and wonderful things.

Savannah sat up, heart beating so hard she felt she might choke on it.

There would be no escaping memories tonight. She brushed at the tears that had formed in her eyes. She'd been happy there. It was the last time she could remember being happy.

But memories of the loft were only the backdrop for memories of him, and memories of him would soon lead her to places of darkness and suffering she dared not go. At least not as Savannah.

She pulled the cat suit from her bag, stripped off her clothes, and pulled it on. In this suit, in the persona she'd created, she could go to those dark places, remember those dark things.

She put on jeans and a turtleneck to cover the suit, leaving the hood piece and mask off. It was early still for an evening out, and the summer dusk still lingered. She would walk, use the time to morph herself into the monster.

As Savannah stepped into the elevator, the phone in her hotel room began to ring.

Roman put down the phone. He clenched his hand into a fist and stared at it. What was he doing? It had been four years since he'd made a vow to himself to give up on her.

She'd run away, left him.

But more than that she'd called him a monster, smeared everything they'd had together, and torn out pieces of his soul.

She'd left him, and never looked back. After months of chasing her he'd let her go. In the process he'd lost the smiling, gregarious, confident man he had been, and become this cold, dark thing he was now.

But was it her? After all these years, was she this close?

Savannah Jones. The girl he'd lost had not been 'Jones,' but she'd been Savannah. His Georgia peach.

Roman paced the floor of his townhouse on the outskirts of Chicago. His skin itched with restlessness. The urge to follow up the ten phone calls he'd made with a personal visit was nearly overwhelming.

Peter had assured him that the artist didn't know his name, that it had never come up, but it wouldn't have been hard for her to figure out. She knew the name of the building she was designing it for, had sketches with the architecture firm's logo on them, knew Peter. Any of those things could easily lead her back to him.

Was this an elaborate game of cat and mouse?

If it was, then the woman named Savannah wasn't the woman he'd known. His Savannah was light and bright, with quick wit and startling blue eyes. All she was, all she wanted, was on the surface, exposed fearlessly to the world.

This was making him insane, thinking of her.

As he paced, the question of *why, why, why* circled around him like a chirping bird. Why had she left him?

He had to stop thinking about her.

Roman sank down into his overly stuffed brown leather recliner and flicked on the TV. Five minutes later he turned it off.

Head back, he let himself remember her.

"You've been a naughty girl," he said sternly.

Savannah, eyes bright, hair spilling in straight ribbons around her bare shoulders, shook her head. "No, I haven't."

"Oh, but you have."

"What did I do?" She tossed her head, flicking her hair behind her shoulder, drawing attention to her bare breasts. Their tips were rosy in the sunlight that spilled in through their wall of windows.

It was dusk. She knelt naked on the floor of their loft. Her easel and his stacks of paperwork were put away. The white couch with its mint green pillows was hidden under a dark blue cloth. When they played, they set the stage, and played hard.

"You back-talked," he said, raising a brow. She fluttered her lashes, teasing him. They were still early in the night's play. Soon there would be no banter, no teasing, only rawpower and sex.

"You make me want you too much," he said, voice rough. God, he loved her.

"How much?" The teasing light was gone from her eyes and her chest was rising and falling, her nipples now hard. She shifted her weight, and he knewshe was getting wet.

He caught her long hair in his hand, wrapping it through his fingers. He jerked her head back. She gasped, licking her lip as she looked up at him.

"I would die for you," he whispered. He kissed her. Her hands came up, cupped his neck, but he pushed them away and down. She did it again, slowly, deliberately.

He stepped away, to their toy box.

He was the Master, her Master, but he was under her spell. If she didn't want to be restrained she would have kept her hands to herself after the first warning, but she wanted to be tied tonight, and he pulled a fewlengths of soft nylon rope from the box.

His cock, already hard, swelled to bursting as he forced her to her feet, then tied her hands behind her back. He bound her arms so they were folded behind her back, multiple loops of rope defusing the pressure on her elbows and wrists.

The position thrust her breasts forward. Roman took them in his hands, thumbs flicking the nipples. She spread her legs.

"You're mine," he said, looking into her eyes.

"Yes, Master," she whispered the last word. They were still playing with it, and it could be awkward, but on this night it felt right.

He needed to have her, now

Roman savaged her lips with a rough kiss, pinching and tweaking her nipples with his fingers.

He spun her around, braced a hand at her hip and bent her forward. She swayed, almost falling, but he slid his arm under her belly, holding her in place.

With his free hand he positioned his cock, rubbing the tip through the wet crevasse of her sex. She was hot and slippery. She wanted him, wanted this, as much as he did.

He'd never had the courage to indulge in these fantasies before he had her. He had no secrets from her.

He pressed the tip of his cock forward, slipping it into her. He pushed her upper body further forward, and slid his cock fully into her.

He wanted to ask her if she was okay, if he was hurting her by holding her like this, but he didn't want to break the mood. Instead he held still, through he desperately wanted to move. Savannah was patiently still beneath him. Her body's weight lay trustingly on his arm, her head was bowed, hair sweeping nearly to the floor.

Roman grinned, happy and in love.

"I'm going to fuck you."

"Yes, Master."

"Beg."

"Fuck me, fuck me please. I need to feel you in me, filling me."

She shifted her hips, squeezing him with her sex. Roman groaned in pleasure. He pulled his cock from her warm channel, then thrust back in, sinking balls deep into her.

He fucked her, long and hard. He controlled her body, pushing it away as he withdrew, then slamming it back onto his cock as he thrust forward.

Roman pushed himself out of the chair. He paced his living room, running his hands through his hair.

He remembered the feel of her skin under his fingers, the smell of her hair. It had been five years since he last saw her, but he hadn't forgotten anything.

He had to get out of here, he would go insane if he stayed. He thought about calling Peter and going out to a bar, but he wasn't in the mood to play games. At least, not those sorts of games.

He grabbed his cell phone and placed a call to a private BDSM club in the heart of the city. He didn't want to participate, but he was in luck. There was a special show tonight. Some famous Domme was in Chicago and would be performing.

That was just what he needed, something dark to match his mood. A Domme wouldn't remind him of Savannah, and what he'd lost when she left him.

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Chapter Five

The room was crowded, and only his reputation got Roman a seat. He ended up on a couch, pressed next to another Dom, whose sub was curled up on his lap. As the Dom tickled the girl, whose hair was up in pigtails, her ballet slipper-shod feet kicked Roman's thigh.

He turned and gave the Dom a long, cold stare. He didn't recognize the man, who was portly in the extreme. The Dom looked him up and down, sniffed when he saw that Roman didn't have a sub with him, but pushed his own sub off his lap. She curled up on the floor, cooing and batting her lashes.

Roman turned to the stage. He didn't have a regular sub, but once he'd had the most beautiful and graceful of woman. He'd had a woman whose passion and fire could be expressed in submission. A woman who'd followed him into the darkest parts of the BDSM world.

And he'd lost her.

The show started, tearing Roman from his dark thoughts.

The house lights went down, and the packed crowd of BDSM enthusiasts fell silent. The majority of the women in the room were subs, the men Doms, but they all wanted to see the female Domme.

The single spotlight on the stage lit up, illuminating a naked man. He wore a collar, the leash dangling down the center of his body like a too-long tie. The Domme stepped into the light.

Roman sat up, eyes wide in surprise, then narrowing. The Domme wore a black cat-suit over a too-thin body. A black half mask covered her face, crystal beads catching the light as she walked around the sub, her gloved hands skimming his chest and arms.

It was the hair that gave her away. Auburn hair fell to the middle of her back in a straight curtain.

Roman's heart was thumping so loudly he could barely hear. It was Savannah, his Savannah.

No, it wasn't. This woman was too thin, pronounced cheekbones showing under the mask. Savannah was curved, perpetually failing at diets as she tried to lose 10 pounds he never wanted her to lose. She had a round face with full cheeks, and dark hair.

But there was something about this Domme. The way she held herself, the tilt of her head, the way her straight hair fell over her shoulders. It was all Savannah.

Surely he was seeing things, seeing Savannah because he'd been thinking of her.

He watched the Domme skillfully torture the sub. The sub's face was a picture of ecstasy. The Domme engaged his body and his mind, taking him deep into sub-space but not allowing him to become passive.

The audience watched, breathless, as the Domme wielded the whip. She had been whispering to the sub, but now she spoke a command loud enough for them to hear.

It wasn't Savannah. This Domme had a faint southern accent. Despite Savannah's name she was a California girl, born and bred. She'd talked about moving to Savannah, where her grandparents still lived, but it was a day dream, no more. He couldn't imagine his beach-loving California girl giving up the sun and palm trees for the south.

Roman relaxed and tried to focus on watching the show. It wasn't Savannah.

The sub sassed her, a gentle teasing meant to show her that he could handle more. The Domme threw her head back and laughed.

Roman sat up. It was her.

He waited until the performance was over. While most of the audience was busy indulging in the arousal the show had awakened, Roman slipped backstage. She was there, cane in hand, bent over a bag.

"Savannah?"

The Domme slowly straightened, her back to him.

"Savannah," he sighed. He'd found her. The anger he expected to feel wasn't there. Instead he was filled with sweet relief.

"It ~~was~~ you I saw."

"I've missed you." It wasn't what he meant to say. He didn't want to admit softness. Since she'd left him he'd learned to hide any softness, to protect himself from being hurt the way she'd hurt him.

"How dare you?" Her voice was trembling with rage. Roman fell back a pace as she whirled, her hair flying out around her. "How *dare* you?"

"How dare *I*?" Roman took a step forward. He wanted to rip the mask from her face. "You came to my city, designed a piece of art for my building, and perform in my club, and you ask me how I dare."

"I didn't know it was your building, not until I saw you crossing the lobby. Why aren't you in LA?"

"Where did you get that accent?"

She took a deep breath, then shook her head. She turned back to her bag and pulled out a pair of jeans, which she put on over the catsuit.

He'd found her, after all these years. The questions he'd lived with for five years sprang from his lips.

"Why? Why did you leave me?"

The shirt she was in the process of putting on fell from her hands. "How could you ask me that?"

"You left me. You walked away without ever looking back."

"I left you?" She turned, gaze scorching him. "You're pouting because I left you?" She threw her head back and laughed.

Angrier than he'd been in a long time, Roman grabbed her arm. Savannah grabbed the cane and lashed his arm. Roman released her.

"Don't touch me. Don't you ever touch me again."

"If you hated what we were doing, if we'd gotten too deep in the scene, you should have told me." Roman clenched his hand into fists. "Instead you walked away, told me I was a freak for wanting the things I did. You were the only person I'd ever trusted enough to try those things with, and you used it against me." It rankled that she was here, in a BDSM club, clearly a master of the art. She'd left him because he'd taken her too deep into the scene, and yet now he discovered that she'd been participating for all the years they were apart.

That could only mean that it wasn't the BDSM she'd left, but him.

"You cannot possibly think you are the injured party." She looked up at him, and he got his first clear look at her eyes through the mask.

"You left me." *I loved you, so very much, and you tore me apart.*

"*I left you?* You betrayed me," her voice caught on a sob. "You *murdered* me."

The anger and grief were thick in her voice. Roman stared at her, startled by the pain she showed.

Savannah picked up her bag and ran. She slammed out of the building, setting the alarms blaring as she exited through a fire door. As people came running, shouting questions, Roman stood, still as a statue.

He'd pictured that first meeting with Savannah many times. He imagined she'd be cool, haughty. She'd flaunt the white-picket-fence life she'd left him for. She'd look down her nose at him and call him a perverted freak. He'd respond with cool civility, flaunting his success and wealth.

Instead she'd seemed almost frightened of him. What was going on?

Roman left the club. He returned to his house and poured himself a glass of scotch. Mid-way through the second glass Roman found himself thinking back on the last time he'd seen Savannah.

They'd gone away for the weekend, to a BDSM house party near Santa Barbara...

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Chapter Six

Five years ago

"Are you nervous?" he whispered into her hair.

"No," she whispered, but she was snuggled against him. They were waiting in the foyer of a beautiful house in the Santa Barbara wine country. Roman could hardly believe they were here. They were going to spend the whole weekend indulging in sexual fantasies. He'd had a hard on for most of the drive.

Savannah had slid her fingers into his pants, freeing his cock, and played with him as he drove. Each time her slender artist fingers brought him close to climax she'd pressed her thumb to the vein on the underside, stopping his orgasm.

Roman had arrived with blue balls, but a big smile.

They checked in with their host, Mr. Wilcox, a man they knew from the BDSM scene in LA. He'd invited them to come up for the weekend to a house party. All the guests were other BDSM enthusiasts. Savannah had been hesitant about going--she thought Mr. Wilcox was creepy--but the Stalwoods were also going.

Mr. Wilcox greeted them with a handshake for Roman.

"Mr. Wilcox, thank you again for inviting us," Savannah said.

"That's Master Wilcox," he chided.

Roman stiffened, pulling Savannah tighter against him, but she just smiled, lowered her eyes, and whispered, "Please excuse my mistake, Master Wilcox."

The corner of her mouth twitched and Roman relaxed. Savannah thought it was ridiculous to address people by the title of Master. She was an avid reader of historical novels, and she'd told him that for her the title of Master would forever be associated with little boys being reprimanded by their governesses.

As Mr. Wilcox led them to their room Roman tickled her, whispering threats of what he'd do to her if she gave them away by laughing. Savannah was biting her lip to hold in giggles by the time they were at their room.

Mr. Wilcox let them in, and told them when and where to meet for cocktails.

They'd explored their room, then rolled around on the canopied bed, giggling like teenagers. The four poster bed was lovely, made of heavy wood. Each of the posters was outfitted with restraints.

"Nice," he said, holding one up and wiggling his eyebrows.

"Don't start something you can't finish," she purred, raising her arms above her head so her breasts thrust up.

Roman pounced on her and kissed her. The kiss had progressed to heavy petting when she tugged on his earlobe.

"We have to get dressed."

He laid his head on her shoulder. "I need to shower."

"I'll help you."

Toiletries bag in hand they'd stepped out into the hall only to see a naked, leashed woman crawling from the bathroom. Her wet hair dripped around her face, and goosebumps covered every inch of flesh. The man with her struck her ass with a crop.

"We'll be out in a minute," he said, smiling at them. He looked Savannah up and down possessively, nodded at Roman, and then led his sub away.

Savannah was trembling slightly. Roman couldn't wait to have Savannah naked and on her knees, but he didn't want her scared.

"It's okay," he whispered, "we'll ease into it."

When she was in the correct mood Savannah craved every dirty thing he could do to her. When she was aroused she would beg for him to whip her pussy, and it was up to Roman to play safe for both of them. But she wasn't as excited about this weekend as he was. She was happier playing in the safety of their apartment than in the club, and the idea of 'performing' for strangers was making her nervous. Roman wanted to show her off. He wanted other people to see how beautiful, how uninhibited, she could be.

They showered together. Roman slid soapy fingers over her clit, arousing her. He didn't let her come. But by the time they were dry and in their room her eyes were dilated with arousal.

They dressed, Roman in slacks and a button down shirt, Savannah in a slinky black cocktail dress, no underwear. Roman slid a collar, a pretty thing made of leather and lace with a small d-ring in the back, around her throat. It looked like a choker. Only in this setting, with these people, would it be seen as anything more sinister.

Her heels had ankle straps, and she wore her hair loose around her shoulder. She tried to curl it, putting in hot rollers as Roman watched in amusement. As always, five minutes after she took out the rollers her hair was perfectly straight.

Sitting at the vanity she groaned in disgust. "I wish I had curly hair."

"Your hair is perfect."

She smiled at him in the mirror, and, not for the first time that day, Roman thought of how completely and perfectly in love with her he was.

They went downstairs, Savannah holding his arm. A lace leash dangled from the back of her collar.

They mingled with their fellow BDSM enthusiasts, including the Stalwoods. They were a nice couple, in their mid forties, who'd stumbled upon a mutual love of S and M while trying to rekindle the spark in their marriage. They were not enthralled with dominance and submission, but more with the idea of pushing each other to the limits, finding the places where pain and pleasure were indistinguishable.

Savannah started the evening plastered to his side. Drinks were being served by Mr. Wilcox's slaves. Three women, all in their late thirties, strolled naked among the guests, balancing trays of drinks. Each woman had pieced nipples, with a chain connecting them. A third chain led from the center of the nipple chain to loop through the ring in their belly-button and down to their clit.

They knew the chain was attached to a ring through the clit because Mr. Wilcox had taken great pains to show it off to them when they arrived. He'd grabbed a passing girl by the chain, yanked her over, and then forced the lips of her sex open.

Roman admitted to himself that he found the piercing and chains hot, but the blank look on the women's faces was anything but arousing. When Ms. Stalwood, Karen, told them that pieced clits often lost feeling, he'd abandoned the idea.

Gradually Savannah relaxed, and she began rubbing against him and looking up through her lashes.

That night they were treated to a show put on by one of the other couples. John and Patrick were from San Francisco, and John was a rope expert. When Mr. Wilcox led them to one of his play rooms, where the shows were to take place, the subs had to remove their clothing.

Roman turned to Savannah, ran his finger down the front of her dress and said, "Off."

With a murmur of "Yes, Master", she obeyed. He could have jumped for joy. She was naked, save for the black heels, her head high, back straight, and he felt a little more in love with her.

He knew she was nervous about her body. She thought she needed to lose ten pounds, hated that one breast was bigger than the other, and thought her butt was rumpy--though he'd never figured that one out. But as he led her into the playroom, she was confidence personified.

The playroom had hardwood floors and plastic furniture. He sank down into a surprisingly comfortable chair and Savannah perched on his knee. Mr. Wilcox's slaves came around with thick rubber mats, which they placed on the floor beside each master. Roman left Savannah on his knee as Patrick and John set up, only ordering her onto the mat as the show was about to start.

That night they watched John weave a net of rope for Patrick that left him dangling from the ceiling. The climax of the show was John showing everyone how he'd perfectly positioned Patrick to be fucked. John pulled his cock from his pants and slid it into his sub's ass. A little push sent Patrick swinging away, and when he swung back John guided his ass onto his cock.

When John offered to teach them to do the same, each Master in the room leapt at the chance. He'd never been interested in complicated rope play before, and Roman knew Savannah felt the same, but when he tipped her face up, she was licking her lips in arousal.

With John's help Roman suspended Savannah from the ceiling. She was face to the floor with her knees curled up into her chest, arms across her chest like a mummy. In this near-fetal position, she couldn't move, couldn't see him.

Standing behind her, his rock-hard cock in his hand, Roman nearly jumped out of his skin when Mr. Wilcox appeared at his elbow.

"She's enjoying this," he said quietly, his gaze was on Savannah's ass and pussy. Roman swallowed the urge to step forward and put his body between Mr. Wilcox and Savannah. All the other subs were on display. He didn't want to appear weak or novice in front of his host.

"I didn't think she would enjoy this," Roman said truthfully.

"She's a born submissive," Mr. Wilcox said. "You're not pushing her hard enough."

"We're just starting out--"

"You think your gentleness is good, kind," Mr. Wilcox cut through his words as if he'd never spoken. He looked at Roman and his eyes burned with conviction. "She is at war with herself. She was raised in a society that says she should not want the things she does. But her body, her heart, craves this." He gestured to the ropes that held her, "and more. She will never be truly happy until you take her all the way, until you make her a true submissive. She wants it. Needs it."

And he walked away.

Roman stepped up to Savannah, running his fingers through the curls over her sex, stroking her clit until she was thrashing in the ropes. He grabbed them to stop the slow spin her movement had started and then guided his cock to her sex.

He fucked her, and the angle allowed his cock to bump her g-spot with each thrust. She came, begging and moaning for him to fuck her harder. He had yet to come, so he slid his slippery cock into her ass.

Savannah yelped and twitched, her ass flexing as he pushed his cock in. He pushed forward until he was fully within her. He grabbed two of the four ropes holding her and pulled them, lifting her upper body.

A crowd had gathered around them. Savannah saw them as he tilted her upright, and for a moment she fell silent. Roman was about to loosen the ropes and allow her to face the floor and hide from the watchers, but she screamed, "Fuck me please, Master. Fuck my ass, fuck your naughty girl's ass."

Roman reached around her and grabbed her breasts, one in each hand. The ropes around her legs took her body weight as he held her up so he could fuck her ass. He pounded into her, the ropes creaking, his breath heaving in and out. Through it all Savannah begged and pleaded for him to fuck her.

Her words, the passion that oozed from her, brought him to blistering climax. As he came he looked around, meeting the gaze of the other Doms.

Yes, she is mine, all mine. Envy me.

They clapped when he brought her to a second orgasm with his fingers on her clit. Savannah hung limp as he and John got her down. Other couples had retired to bed, so Roman picked her up, something she rarely let him do, and carried her to their room. He washed her with a warm washcloth, then took a quick shower before climbing into bed beside her.

Savannah curled against his chest, her breath coming in small puffs, as she drifted to sleep.

Roman lay awake in the dark. Was Mr. Wilcox right? Was Savannah a born submissive?

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Chapter Seven

Savannah woke up with protesting muscles and skin that was tender to the touch. She stretched, smiling as Roman's hand smoothed down her belly.

"Good morning," he said, smiling.

She loved his smile. It lit up his whole face. The corners of his eyes would crinkle up, and she could imagine him when he was older, with handsome wrinkles fanning from his eyes, like Paul Newman.

She ran the tip of his fingers over the corners of her eyes, then over his smiling lips. He kissed her fingers, then leaned in. They kissed softly as morning light caressed her bare back.

"How are you feeling?" Roman asked, smoothing her hair behind her ear.

"Sore," she said. Ridiculously, she was blushing.

"Where?" he asked, concern wrinkling his brow.

"It's okay," she whispered. "I'm fine."

"Let me kiss it better."

"Well then I'm sore here." She touched her right cheek. He pressed his lips to her cheek. She touched her other cheek.

With a smile he followed her finger, kissing her neck, her collar bones, her belly, and finally her breasts.

They made love slowly, the sun falling over them and warming them. Savannah came quickly, clutching Roman and biting his shoulder. When she lay back Roman braced himself on his elbows and pounded into her until he too came, the muscles of his neck straining.

Afterwards they lay together, Savannah's legs hooked together behind his back, Roman's head on her shoulder.

"Are you sure you're alright?" he asked, lifting his head to look into her eyes.

"I'm sure. Last night was ... I don't even know. It was crazy intense, but I liked it. I would have never done that if I hadn't been so completely turned on."

"What color would it be?" he asked. Savannah laughed. Once when she was trying to describe a car accident she'd seen while driving she'd told him it was mangled yellow. Ever since then if she was having trouble expressing something, he would ask her what color it was.

"Last night it was red, hot red, but now it feels pink, mostly because I'm embarrassed."

"Why? You were gorgeous."

"All those people saw me naked. They saw us having sex."

"They did, and they all envied me for having you."

"Do you think so?" Savannah didn't believe him, not really. There were far more beautiful women here, women who weren't so shy about showing the world their sexual side. Savannah had only been with one man before she started dating Roman. With him the sex had been awkward and painful and she'd never known what to do, where to touch. With Roman it was none of those things, and when he took out a pair of handcuffs one night, and locked her hands together, Savannah had found that, by having her hands bound, she knew exactly what it was she wanted to do, where she wanted to touch.

Roman had shown her how to put the passion she used for her art into sex. When he told her he was into BDSM, stuttering over the words, and then haltingly explained what that meant, she'd trustingly followed him into the dark. She trusted him with both her body and soul.

She'd had doubts yesterday. The women Mr. Wilcox called his 'slaves' frightened her. Their blank stares and menacing piercings weren't sexy--they were frightening and debasing. She'd stayed because she knew a single look or word from her and Roman would take her away from this place.

It was because she knew he would leave if she asked him that she stayed. He was looking forward to this weekend, and she could feel the excitement radiating from him.

In the end it had been worth it. The rope scene had been incredibly sexy, and when Roman put her in, looping the soft nylon around her in beautiful complicated loops, she'd found that the anticipation that built was pleasure almost as sweet as an orgasm.

She had no desire to perform before an audience, no desire to be put on display, but last night she had wanted everyone to know how much her lover pleased her. She wanted Roman to feel like the luckiest man in the world, so she'd abandoned her misgivings and given herself over to the pleasure.

There was a soft rap at the door. A female voice said, "Breakfast is available."

Roman pushed himself off her. "Hungry?"

"Very," she said, sitting up. "I want a shower. Will you check and see if anyone's in there?"

Roman went to the door, scratching his belly and yawning. He peeked his head out and then, with a wicked grin at her, sauntered naked down the hall to check the bathroom.

"It's free," he said, wandering back into their room.

"I'll take a fast shower. Wait for me?"

"Of course."

Savannah picked out a pretty sundress and carried it and her bathroom bag to the door. With a parting smile at her lover, she too wandered naked down the hall to the bathroom.

After breakfast, they went outside to bask in the sun. The Stalwoods were curled up together on the extra wide chaise next to theirs.

"Did you enjoy last night?" Robert Stalwood asked.

Savannah shifted closer to Roman, resting her head on his shoulder. The question had been addressed to her, but she didn't want to answer it. She wasn't comfortable enough to discuss what she'd done last night.

"It was amazing," Roman said, petting her back. Savannah relaxed. He knew her so well. "Did you enjoy it? I know straight bondage isn't much to your liking."

"Oh I think this weekend might open our eyes to a few things," Robert said.

"Though I doubt we'd be able to manage those ropes without some help," Karen said. "There's a bit too much of me to hoist."

"Don't be silly," Savannah said, turning over to face Karen, "you're perfect."

"That's what I tell her," Robert said, kissing his wife's head.

They lay in companionable silence for an hour. Other couples made their way into the backyard, and soon the pool was full of naked bodies. Savannah lacked any form of athletic skill, so she bowed out of naked pool volleyball, but sat on the sidelines and cheered as Roman played.

His broad shoulder caught the light as he bumped the ball into the air. One of the other women, the female half of a couple Savannah remembered meeting last night, bumped into him as she jumped to spike the ball. She wrapped her arm around his shoulders, her bare breasts on his chest.

Savannah opened her mouth to tell the bitch off, when someone touched her shoulder.

"It is not a submissive's place to be possessive." It was Mr. Wilcox. Despite the nice weather and the general state of undress he wore slacks and a long sleeve shirt complete with cufflinks.

Savannah was sitting on the edge of the pool, her skirt pulled up, legs dangling in the water. Mr. Wilcox pulled up a chair, placing it beside Savannah, and took a seat. She didn't like the way he'd positioned himself, so he was looming over her.

"We're more than a submissive and Master," she said coolly. "Outside the scene we're boyfriend and girlfriend." At the last moment she remembered to tack on, "Master Wilcox."

"How quaint." He steepled his fingers and watched the game. He looked ridiculous sitting beside the pool dressed and behaving as if he were in some corporate meeting. "There are some, including myself, who think it impossible for a Dominant and his submissive to be anything but that."

"Then I guess Roman and I are the exception," she said, looking him in the eye. She did not like his tone or his attitude. Savannah boldly stared him down, breaking rules left and right in the process. She expected him to report her to Roman, or maybe tell the others what a bad sub she was.

She did not expect to be afraid, but she was. There was something heartlessly cold in his eyes. He tilted his head and looked her up and down, his gaze lingering on the swell of her breast above the bodice of her sundress. He appraised her like a piece of beef, with no emotion or desire.

"You could be great," he told her. "He is too soft with you. I will teach him to break you."

On that disturbing note, Mr. Wilcox got up and walked away.

"Hey babe," Roman swam over. Bracing one hand on the edge of the pool, he pushed his cool, wet finger under the hem of her dress, tracing a pattern on her thigh. "You okay?"

Savannah looked over her shoulder. Mr. Wilcox was watching her.

"I'm fine," she said, waving him back into the game. She didn't want Wilcox to know he'd rattled her. There would be time later to tell Roman what he'd said.

That afternoon the play became more serious. Robert and Karen were going to demonstrate a variety of 'punishment' devices. Mr. Wilcox gave a long lecture on the importance of having true 'punishment' for when a 'slave's' behavior was unacceptable, as opposed to play punishment, which involved the erotic use of a variety of weapons and scary looking things.

Mr. Wilcox showed everyone the dog kennel he locked his slaves in when they truly needed punishment. Savannah was so horrified that she nearly got up and left, but one couple laughed, saying that they had a kennel like that which they used for play. The man, who was the sub, said that twenty minutes locked in there with a vibrator going in his ass was sweet torment. Once he was out, they always had amazing sex.

Savannah reminded herself that different people like different things, and Mr. Wilcox's 'slaves' probably got off on all the stuff he did.

Once he was done with his pompous lecture, Karen and Robert got up on stage. They both looked nervous--Robert was white as a sheet, and Karen's fingers fumbled with the tie of her robe. When they glanced her way Savannah gave them a thumbs up and a friendly smile.

Karen rolled her eyes and dropped her robe. She wasn't young, and her body showed its age. There was a slight pouch to her belly and her thighs were heavy, but when she once more looked Savannah's way, Savannah licked her lips in an exaggerated manner. Karen smiled and turned back to Robert.

Pleased with herself for helping her friend, Savannah watched more with an eye for how she could help her friend be successful than for what she could learn. Robert began by stroking Karen, concentrating on her back and thighs. Soon Karen was pressing into his hands, aroused by what was nearly a platonic touch.

He started massaging her ass, his fingers digging in to the soft flesh. He pulled his hand back and spanked her, a firm swat to her left ass cheek. Karen jumped, then moaned. Robert spanked her nine more times, five to each cheek.

There was nothing nervous or unsure about them. They were in their element, and it had transformed them. Karen's cheeks were flushed with color, her lips full and pink. Robert appeared taller, stronger than normal. Savannah stopped seeing them as her friends, and started seeing what it was they were trying to show.

Robert picked up a wooden hair brush. "There are many variations to spanking." He smoothed the wooden back of the brush over Karen's ass. "From positions--standing, kneeling, or the classic over the knee--to implements--the hand, a hairbrush, a ruler.

"The key to spanking is to go slow, to draw it out. It is not the pain that arouses the sub, as much as they might think that." He winked at Karen, who stood perfectly still, her hands clasped together and resting on top of her head. "It's the heat that spreads after the blow that arouses them. It is the knowledge that you are willing and able to do something so forbidden to them."

He smacked her ass with the hairbrush. Savannah jumped. She shifted on the pad she knelt on. She was painfully aroused. Her sex was so wet she could feel it seeping down the inside of her thighs, and her nipples, barely visible through the see-through black teddy she wore, were hard as diamonds.

Robert paddled Karen's ass with the hairbrush, showing how the color was deeper than that caused by his hand. When he'd done ten strokes with the brush he pressed the bristles between Karen's spread legs, pushing the sharp points against her pussy.

Next, he picked up a ruler.

Savannah would have shied away from something as harsh as a ruler normally, but now she couldn't wait for it.

She'd never been a fan of spanking. Roman had tried it a few times, but usually he'd ask her to beg for it, or take so long talking about it that she wasn't fired up by the time he got around to it. She did like a few swats during sex, especially if he was fucking her from behind, but after watching this she knew that those spans hardly counted. She wanted to experience what Karen was experiencing; she wanted Roman to spank her like that, with a firm hand and steady knowledge of what she was doing.

Kneeling beside him, Savannah ran one hand up the inside of his thigh and lay her palm over his groin. His cock was rock hard. He raised a brow and Savannah slid her right hand down the center of her body, then between her legs. She closed her eyes as she stroked her clit a few times. She pulled her fingers from her sex, rubbing them together to show him how slippery and wet she was, then slid her fingers into her mouth, licking them clean.

Roman leaned forward, a hand braced on the arm of the chair as if he were going to push himself up. Savannah imagined him throwing her over his shoulder and carrying her to their room where he would ravish her.

Roman shot her a stern look and settle back in his chair. She widened her eyes innocently and turned back to the show.

The ruler left long, pink stripes on Karen's already colorful ass.

After the ruler, Robert moved on to other implements, things that would never be used in conjunction with a relatively harmless spanking. He had a paddle, a cane, a twase, a flogger, and a cat-o-nine.

Out of context each implement seemed more fit for a torture chamber than the bedroom, but in the warm hush of that room Savannah saw the beauty and eroticism in each. She watched greedily as the cat-o-nine flicked over Karen's breasts.

Faint pink lines appeared, decorating the other woman's flesh. Savannah's hands moved to her own breasts, but Roman caught them. He pulled her wrists up and over her head, forcing them behind her neck, where he bound them in place with the leash that dangled from the back of her collar.

"Watch," he growled in her ear.

"Touch me," she begged him. She'd never needed to come as desperately as she did in that moment.

"Roman, your slave looks eager to experience punishment. You can be the first," Robert said.

Roman rose from his chair, pulling Savannah to her feet. She was unsteady, her legs gone numb from kneeling for too long, so he threw her over her shoulder, carrying her to the stage.

The world spun dizzily as Savannah was set down. Soft hands replaced Roman's and Karen whispered, "Are you sure you want this?"

"Yes," she said, "Oh yes. Does it hurt?"

"Yes."

"Good."

Then Roman was there, stripped to the waist. He sat and drew her down over his lap. He untied her hands and then forced them together at the small of her back, holding them in place.

He adjusted his knees so his legs were spread, one under her hips, the other under her ribs pressing her breasts towards her chin.

His hand smoothed over her ass and Savannah pushed up on her toes, pressing her ass up into his hand. He pushed down, forcing her back into position.

"Oh yes," someone murmured. Savannah looked up to see Mr. Wilcox standing in a pool of shadow. He was watching her, avidly. One of his slaves knelt at his feet, sucking his erect cock.

Roman spanked her. The flat of his hand landed with a solid thump on her right ass cheek. Savannah jumped, more from surprise than pain. He smacked her left cheek, with a bit more force. This time she really felt it. Pleasant heat radiated from the handprint he'd left.

She could hear Robert coaching him, occasionally turning and addressing the audience. Despite these reminders that they were not alone Savannah wasn't scared, or embarrassed. She was in the arms of the man she loved, being pleased in a way most people would never experience.

He cracked her ass again, harder than ever, and she cried out, but it was in relief. Now he was doing it, pushing her, making her feel. Soon the blows landed hard and steady. When she struggled to get away he held her still, when she panted and begged he pushed a finger into her sex, or rubbed her clit, but never enough to make her come.

Her ass was on fire, the heat of the blows was constant now, spiking when a new blow landed, but never fading.

Then it changed, the blows louder, the sting sharper. She struggled to look over her shoulder and saw him holding the hairbrush. She met his gaze and there was something dark and frightening in it. She loved him.

He beat her with the brush, until she was thrashing, her toes kicking the floor, her face wet with tears. If she'd been able to speak she would have begged for the cane or the whip. She was sure that if he would just hurt her a little more, she would come.

His left hand held her wrists together, his right was on her flaming ass, so when fingers pried apart the cheeks of her bottom and ran slippery lubricant over her anus Savannah jerked in real surprise.

"Be still," he barked, swatting her ass sharply.

Something cool and wide pressed against her anus. Savannah sobbed as the glass plug was forced into her. The contrast of the cold in her ass and the burning cheeks was startling.

Roman pinched her ass cheeks together around the plug, then put two fingers into her sex, probing the plug from within her body.

He went back to spanking her with his hand, each blow shifting the plug. She was shaking and shivering. The room seemed dim and her head was spinning. She worried she might pass out.

Then she was sliding from his lap, on her knees before him. His cock was out of his pants, and without a second thought she leaned forward and took it in her mouth. She sucked and licked him, feeling grounded now that she could touch him.

"Lift your ass," he barked, and she shifted position. Laying her arms along the tops of his thighs she continued sucking his cock. A white-hot line of pain sizzled across her ass. She cried out around his cock. She twisted to see what it was, but he forced her head down onto his shaft. She caught a glimpse of a slim whip from the corner of her eye and then the pain came again.

She was shivering, racked with emotions and sensations she could no longer name. Roman lifted her head from his cock.

"Your breasts have been ignored," he said. "Beg me to hurt them."

"Please, please my love," she begged, too far gone to remember silly titles or trite manners of address, "I need it. I need to come. I need you to make me come. I need you to hurt me. I want you to touch my breast. I want you to pinch my nipples, the way you do, the way I like."

She massaged his cock with her fingers as the words tumbled from her mouth. Roman smiled, a savage frightening thing, then nodded to someone she could not see before forcing her mouth onto his cock once more.

Soft hands stroked her dangling breasts, pulling and twisting. There was a sharp pinch and then hard downward pull as weighted clamps were attached to each nipple.

The weights swung as she bobbed up and down on her cock. They jerked wildly when the lash of the whip caused her to jerk.

Roman said something she couldn't hear, but in the next instant her mouth was filled with his salty come. She swallowed it down, cupping his balls with gentle fingers as his hand clenched painfully in her hair.

Roman's voice again, then a vibrator was against her clit. Savannah had to stop herself from biting down on Roman's softening cock as a wave of blissful pleasure washed over her. The weights abraded her nipples, the plug stretched her ass, and the vibrator buzzed at her clit.

At the moment of orgasm Savannah ripped her mouth from his cock, screaming in savage pleasure as she came. Her toes curled, her belly clenched. The weights were pulled from her nipples and that sent her higher. The vibe stayed on her clit, and now the plug was jerked from her ass only to be forced in again.

The pleasure was continuous, like a tidal wave, risen impossibly high. She could hear voices directing the action, *"Keep the vibe on her clit. Grab the ruler, slap her breasts. Pinch her ass."*

Through it all she held him, her fingers digging into Roman's waist, her nails scratching him.

Enough."

His voice, echoing weirdly through the ringing in her ears. The vibe left her clit, the plug was drawn from her ass. Savannah started to slide to the floor, but Roman scooped her up, cradling her to his chest.

"I'm here, I've got you."

"I love you," she whispered in reply. An inane thing to say after what had just happened to her, but her deep love of the man who had taken her to this dark, glittering place was the overriding emotion in Savannah.

He returned to his seat, Savannah on his lap. She drifted into a waking doze, ignoring the claps of the audience, and unaware of Mr. Wilcox's thoughtful gaze.

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Chapter Eight

Savannah was napping, curled up in the sun like a kitten. Roman sat on the bed beside her and stroked her long hair. He could barely believe what she'd done, what he'd done.

The session they'd just been through was more than Roman had ever hoped to experience with Savannah. He would have never done that to her without the prompting and assistance of Robert and Mr. Wilcox. He'd tried spanking before in the past, but it never got a reaction like today.

There was a gentle knock on the door. Roman answered it, slipping out into the hall so the visitor wouldn't wake Savannah.

Mr. Wilcox silently motioned for Roman to follow. Most of the other doors along the hallway were closed, and Roman remembered that several other couples had said they were planning to nap before that evening's entertainments.

Once they were away from the bedrooms Mr. Wilcox said, "Follow. There is something you need to see."

He took Roman to one of the other play rooms. Unlike the two he'd seen so far this one had a lock on the door.

Through the locked door lay a small, comfortable lounge. There were two plush chairs flanking a small end table. A sideboard held crystal decanters and an array of glasses. The wall opposite the door they'd come in had a floor to ceiling picture window in it. But this window didn't look out on the garden.

Roman glanced from the window to Mr. Wilcox and back.

"Let me show you," he said. He led Roman to a thin door in the wall next to the picture window. It too was locked.

"This is my real training room," Mr. Wilcox said, stroking the wall. "This is where a woman can truly find her potential."

The walls were painted cream, with snowy white crown molding. There were oil paintings, nudes of voluptuous women, in heavy wood frames. A brocade armchair sat in one corner.

Those elements would not be out of place in the elegant lounge next door, but they were a small dash of normalcy in what was an otherwise sinister scene.

The floor was concrete, sloped towards the drain in the center. An elaborate medical chair, almost like a dentist's, but studded with straps, levers, and gears, stood in the middle. Mr. Wilcox opened a wardrobe, displaying a collection of floggers and whips dangling from the inside of the doors. Each of the drawers was full, one with vibrators and glass dildos and plugs, another with medical equipment—speculums, scopes, and surgical needles.

Below that was a drawer of more common toys—gags and hoods, and finally a drawer with pony play equipment that Mr. Wilcox showed while chuckling.

"Pony play is a new interest of mine. My slave girls are still learning, and I have yet to find tails I am completely satisfied with." He took out a tail attached to a large glass dildo, "I like this one, but it is heavy and it falls out of her ass."

Mr. Wilcox sighed and put the tail back in its place. He closed the drawer and then the wardrobe doors.

Roman's stomach was in knots. He was torn between curiosity, arousal, and trepidation. There were things in this room he would desperately like to try with Savannah, and there were things too extreme for his tastes. He again looked at the medical chair.

Following his gaze Mr. Wilcox moved to a small control box. He showed Roman the various capabilities of the chair. It could fold completely flat into a table, the arm pads rotated, as did the legs'.

Roman was only half listening. He wasn't stupid, and he knew Mr. Wilcox was showing him all this for a reason. He looked around again, imagined Savannah in the room with him. He imagined her giggles at seeing some of the things, and her moans if he strapped her to the chair and knelt between her legs, pleasuring her with his tongue.

"It seems I've lost your attention," Mr. Wilcox said.

Roman bit back an apology, not wanting to appear weak. He remained silent as Mr. Wilcox led him from the inner chamber back to the small lounge. He closed and locked the door.

Mr. Wilcox poured them each a drink.

Roman took a seat, and his drink. Mr. Wilcox flipped a switch in the frame of the window. Blinds, sandwiched between the panels of glass, slid down, hiding the room beyond.

"It's soundproof, for understandable reasons. Though there is an intercom, in case I have visitors whom I chose to let both hear and see what my slaves are suffering."

Roman took a sip of the amber liquid. It was fiery and strong. Knowing Mr. Wilcox, that meant it was incredibly expensive.

"Why me?" Roman asked, gesturing to the window with his glass. Though the blinds were down, he had a vivid memory of what the window could show.

"Why you?" Mr. Wilcox swirled her drink, then took a small sip. "Why have I chosen to show you my most private, and interesting, room?"

"Yes."

"I think there is potential for you to be a good Dom, and I see something of you in myself. You're a businessman, aren't you?"

"Yes, real estate." He was just starting out, but he'd spent years working for one of LA's best developers, and his first few investments had paid off. Someday, hopefully in the next year, he'd have enough cash to make some big-ticket purchases. The first would be an engagement ring for Savannah, second a house they'd shop for together.

"Ah, I'm not into dealing with property." He said it with a sneer. Roman took a sip to hold back a comment. He felt like he and Mr. Wilcox were in some negotiation, though what they were negotiating for was a mystery.

"I think you do not take the lifestyle seriously, and you should."

Roman tried to imagine telling Savannah that she had to be his live-in slave girl. She'd laugh herself sick after she stabbed him through the heart with a paintbrush.

"Though I find your lack of commitment distressing, it is understandable. You have not experienced a slave, do not know what it is to be free of the emotional negotiations and compromises that a traditional relationship requires."

"I'm sorry, but if you're suggesting that I spend time with one of your girls, I'm going to have to decline. Savannah and I are faithful."

"I thought you might say that." Mr. Wilcox leaned back in his seat and crossed his legs. "I think I might have come about this in the wrong manner. While I do think you could benefit from a better understand of what a real submissive, a slave, would mean, it is not really you I want to talk about. It is your girl."

"Savannah?"

"To see her last night was a revelation. I thought I'd sensed something in her, but last night confirmed it. She was beautiful. Do you even fully understand what it was she was experiencing, what it was she found so arousing?"

Roman was afraid any answer would reveal that he wasn't the debonair Dom he claimed to be.

"Tell me, without my assistance and prompting regarding what you should do, and without Robert's coaching, would you have gone that far? You would not. You would have stopped, because she would have stopped you."

Mr. Wilcox uncrossed his legs and leaned forward, his eyes glittered with the light of a believer. "She is a born submissive. She deserves to know real happiness. She is stopping you from showing her that, because she doesn't understand what is inside of her. You are hurting her."

Roman wanted to scoff, but he remembered the way she'd looked last night, lost in a pleasure so intense she literally shook from it. Wilcox was right. He would never have done all those things to her if they hadn't been there coaching him through it, assuring him she would enjoy it.

"We'll get there," he replied, shifting in his seat. "We're new to this, especially her. We'll get there."

"You won't because she'll stop you. Last night you were able to take her higher because she was already in sub-space. You know what that is."

Roman nodded. Sub-space was the state of mind a submissive went into while they were with a Dom.

"She was deep into sub-space because of what she'd seen: a woman being properly used by a Master . By the time you laid your hands on her, she was ready to serve you.

"What you need, what she needs," Mr. Wilcox said, his voice low and cajoling, "is for Savannah to be constantly that ready, constantly open to new things. Think of what you could do; think of how good you could make her feel."

Roman imagined her, naked and ready, kneeling at the door when he got home. He shook his head. Wasn't it enough that she greeted him with smiles and kisses? What more could he want?

He could want what Mr. Wilcox described. He wanted to be able to play with her as he had last night, wanted to experience things with her that he was scared to mention in case she rejected them out of hand.

He drained the last of his drink. "How? How do I get her into that sub-space? Is she a voyeur or something? Should we watch porn together?"

"You're being too literal. You should not have to ease her into sub-space. With a snap of your fingers, a single word, she should slip seamlessly into a state of mind where she belongs wholly to you."

Roman wanted that, wanted it with a longing so fierce he could taste it. But more importantly he wanted to please her. He hated admitting that he would not be able, on his own, to reproduce what they'd had together last night. "What do I do?"

"Give her to me."

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Chapter Nine

Savannah licked her lips in anticipation. There was a tug on the leash and she took another step forward. She'd woken to find Roman sitting silently beside her. She'd reached up for a kiss but he'd held her back, instead holding up the blindfold that dangled from his fingers. She opened her mouth to say something, but he'd pressed a finger to her lips.

Seeing his cool, serious, face, she bit her lips to hide her smile, and meekly submitted to being blindfolded. She hadn't balked when he led her from their room, though she was naked. She trustingly followed him down the steps.

Savannah had to bite her lip to keep from grinning. It was clear Roman wanted to play serious Dom right now, and having her trailing behind him grinning wouldn't help the game.

But it was hard not to smile when she was this happy.

She felt closer to Roman than she had two days ago. She felt like last night they'd gone through something together, and had come out the other side more connected than ever.

Plus really good sex always made her happy.

Savannah didn't hear anyone, nor did she sense the presence of any other people, but that didn't mean they weren't there. Maybe it was still early and Roman wanted to play privately before everyone else got up and came down for the evening's festivities.

Her feet moved from hardwood to rugs to carpet. Doors opened and closed. Finally Roman grabbed her shoulders, stopping her. He seated her on something cool and smooth, then helped her to lie back. Her arms were stretched out from her side to lie along more of the same cool, smooth material she rested on. Finally her legs were lifted into place--spread wide enough for her to know he could see her sex.

Savannah was trying to puzzle out what she was lying on, since it was wide enough to accommodate her spread arms and legs, yet it was much firmer than a bed. She gasped, jerking away slightly, when he attached a cuff to her ankle. It was solid metal, and thick, unlike the scarves or rope they usually used.

"I'm here," he soothed, then cleared his throat and said, much more gruffly, "Quiet."

Savannah again bit back a smile. He attached cuffs to the remaining ankle and each wrist. Once they were on, Savannah lifted her hands, testing them. The cuffs seemed to be attached to the thing she was lying on by short bit of chain that rattled when she put her hands down.

Roman's hands slid from the wrist he'd just manacled to her shoulder, then her neck. He cupped the back of her head and kissed her. He whispered "I love you" soundlessly against her lips. She recognized the feel of that whispered pledge, one he'd made many times before.

He broke the kiss before she could respond in kind. There was the sound of footsteps, and the close of a door. Savannah had a brief moment of panic, then stilled. He was leaving her here to build up the anticipation. She relaxed and tried to imagine all the naughty things he would do to her tonight. She hoped they would have sex, instead of just oral. She wanted to experience those mind-blowing orgasms with him inside her.

More footsteps.

Savannah frowned. She hadn't heard the door open.

A gentle electronic hum filled the air, and then a vibrator traced a path down her belly to her sex. She was already wet, and when it pressed against her clit, she arched her hips, shouting, "Roman, yes."

He loved the sound of her shouting his name during sex, but a voice whispered, "Master."

Savannah realized that the other couples must be there, and she did have an audience after all. She didn't care.

"Master," she repeated obediently.

"Tell him what you are," came the hissing whisper. "Tell him you want this, you need this. Tell him you want to be trained to be a fucktoy."

"Master, please," she said out, imagining his cock growing thick and hard at her words. "I want this. I need this. I need you to make me your toy, your slave. Hurt me, fuck me, make me want it." The vibrator was circling her clit, keeping up a steady, maddening, rhythm. "Take me, fuck me, own me," she panted, barely aware of what she was saying. "I need this, I need to be your fucktoy, Master."

Savannah came, moaning in pleasure. It was a nice orgasm, but nothing compared to last night. She wasn't worried. Roman wouldn't have gone to all the trouble of getting her here and tying her down if he didn't have something special planned.

The blindfold was pulled from her eyes.

"Hello, slave."

In the small lounge Roman ran a shaking hand over his face. He wanted to run back in there, scoop her up and take her away, but Mr. Wilcox's words were still ringing in his ears.

There was a click and her voice flooded the small room.

"Master, please. I want this. I need this. I need you to make me your toy, your slave. Hurt me, fuck me, make me want it." Her voice was husky and quiet. He stared at the shuttered window in shock. It had been less than ten minutes and already she was begging Wilcox to fuck her?

"Take me, fuck me, own me." She was panting now. How he loved the sound of her when she was aroused as she clearly was.

"I need this. I need to be your fucktoy, Master."

The speaker clicked off.

Roman turned to the little control panel, wanting to hear more, but a plastic cover, secured with a lock, prevented him from getting to the buttons.

He turned away, angry with her. How dare she be aroused by someone else? In the next breath he realized how ridiculous that was. Of course she was aroused. They'd already established that she was a born submissive, and all she needed was a real Dom to tap into that.

Clearly he wasn't Dom enough for her. He'd unlocked this part of her, and he would have to live with it if that meant that she would be aroused by other Doms.

He should be happy. Wilcox had told him he would turn on the speaker for a few second after he'd revealed to Savannah what they'd decided to do. If she'd been uncomfortable or scared he would have heard that. Instead she was having the time of her life.

Get over it, you started this. Imagine what it will be like after she's had some training. Everything you wanted you'll be able to do.

Wilcox had sworn he wouldn't have sex with her. He wouldn't touch her with anything besides his fingers and his toys. Roman believed him.

Savannah was getting training, so he should too. Hiding his misgivings, even from himself, Roman went to find Robert and get a lesson on wielding a whip.

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Chapter Ten

Savannah looked around, then at Mr. Wilcox. She was alone in the room. Alone with *him*.

"Where's Roman?" she asked, voice husky with fear.

He slapped her hard across the face. "That is no way to address your master."

Savannah licked blood from the inside of her mouth where her cheek had cut on her teeth. She blinked away tears of pain.

Go to hell, you evil son of a bitch. She longed to spit the words at him, but opted to be smart ... and safe.

"Where is Master Roman?" she asked, voice quaking slightly.

He nodded in satisfaction and Savannah pressed her lips together to stop herself from snarling at him. He picked up a vibrator from a small table near her hip and began cleaning it. Her stomach rolled when she realized it was him, not Roman, who had brought her to orgasm.

He took his time cleaning the vibrator, and only when he was done did he speak.

"Your Master has decided he is done with your attitude and your games." He casually reached out and pinched her left nipple. Her skin crawled at his touch. Savannah thrashed in her chains, panting and crying as she tried to get away from him. She was powerless to protect herself.

Wilcox twisted her nipple, laughing as she struggled.

Savannah fell back, her face wet with tears, her breathing ragged.

"Please, I don't want this. Let me go."

"You think you don't want this, but you do." He released her left nipple, flicked her right with his index finger, and then pinched it. Savannah shuddered in disgust.

This couldn't be happening. Roman wouldn't have done this, wouldn't have turned her over to him. He loved her.

"Better," Wilcox said, releasing her nipple. His fingers settle possessively on his belly.

"Roman! Roman! Help me. Please, someone, help!" She screamed at the top of her lungs, begging for salvation.

Wilcox let her scream. Leisurely he went to a tall wardrobe against the far wall and opened it. When she saw what was inside, Savannah screamed louder. Wilcox selected a long, thin piece of wood. It dangled from a hook by a leather strap attached to the handle.

"Roman, Roman!" she screamed. *Save me save me. I love you, you love me, save me.*

Part of Savannah couldn't believe this was happening. The part of her that lived in a world where rules and custom protect a person from unwanted contact and ruled an uninvited touch not only taboo but illegal, couldn't believe what was happening.

But a different part of her knew that she was powerless. She was in a position of weakness and vulnerability.

He could, and would, do whatever he wanted with her.

Wilcox carefully shut the wardrobe doors and turned. He swished the cane through the air.

"Please, don't," she whispered.

He slashed the cane down on her thighs. It wasn't a light blow meant to pinken the skin or raise welts. It cut her, leaving a bloody stripe.

She came up against the bonds. "Fuck you! You're a degenerate asshole. This is sick and wrong. You're pathetic, a pervert who gets off on hurting women who are better than you. You're a small-dicked asshole, and no women in her right mind would ever willingly give herself to you. Fuck you. Let me go, you pathetic son of a bitch!"

She squeezed her eyes closed and tears rolled along her temples into her hair.

"Why are you crying?" he asked gently, petting her hair.

"Why? Why would he do this to me? He loves me," she choked out. The pain from the cane was unending, still radiating along her skin.

"Loves you? Maybe." With the same calm deliberation he'd shown taking it out Wilcox put the cane away. "He did this because you may be a pretty woman, but you will be an exquisite slave."

Savannah's breath caught in a sob. "No," she stuttered out, "no. This is just a game. All this was just a game, good sex. It's not real, not serious."

"If that's true, why are you here?"

She sobbed in response. She turned her head, trying to hide her face against her shoulder, but he caught her chin. When she jerked her face away he grabbed her with both hands, squeezing her head.

He brought his face to within an inch of hers, spit flying from his lips as he spoke. "You listen to me. You will be a slave—a beautiful, obedient slave. I will

teach you to obey. You think this is about you and your wants. The only thing you should want is for your Master to be pleased. And for now, I am that Master."

He shoved her face to the side and stood. Savannah took a few shuddering breaths.

"That was the cane. You saw it used last night for play punishment. The stripe you just received was real punishment. Fair as you are it will probably scar. Let it be a reminder to you to behave. If you pay attention to your training and obey, I won't have to do that again."

He undid the top two buttons of his shirt and Savannah closed her eyes. He was undressing. Next, he would rape her.

She opened her eyes when she heard a snap and saw that he was pulling on rubber gloves. His shirt was partially unbuttoned, his sleeves rolled up.

He returned to the wardrobe, again taking his time. This time he opened one of the interior drawers.

"If I am to train you, I must first get to know you." He set several things down on the table near her hip. A tube, a small flashlight and ... a speculum? She peered at it before decided that yes, it was a speculum. She had a panicked moment wondering if he was going to rip her open with it, but it didn't look any bigger than the one her gynecologist used.

"I am going to know your body," he trailed at hand down her belly to her sex, "inside and out."

He walked around the bottom of the person-shaped table. He activated some motorized bit and her legs were drawn farther apart. He emotionlessly pried the lips of her sex apart. He rubbed each lip in turn, inspecting it. He then pulled back the hood of her clit, and inspected that too.

It was uncomfortable and humiliating, but Savannah's fear was evaporating. Wilcox's clinical detachment was much easier to deal with than the insane fervor that he'd shown when talking about what a wonderful slave she would be.

Savannah closed her eyes and started to paint. In the dark of her mind, she painted pictures. When that wasn't enough to block out the feeling of his lubricated fingers sliding into her, followed by the cold speculum, she started to sculpt. Sculpture was a new art for her, and she found it more engaging to mentally create than paint.

She envisioned a statue of a wave, just cresting to break. What would she make it out of? Clay. Too earthy. Papier mache? Too lumpy. Fabric, stiffened with liquid plastic and drape, would be perfect.

Savannah survived that night. She survived, but she broke.

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Chapter Eleven

Roman sat on the side of the bed, his head in his hands.

He couldn't do it. He didn't care if Savannah was a born submissive, didn't care if she would be happier as some sort of full-time sex toy. He wanted his Savannah back, the girl who painted while sitting in the sunlight, the girl who kissed him with passion and without premeditation.

This was all his fault. He'd introduced her to this world. It was his desires that had pushed them into doing this. He knew that Savannah would have been just as happy to have a completely vanilla sex life.

He'd done this and now he wanted to undo it.

He'd get her away from Wilcox, take her home. If she really, desperately needed this, he'd learn, they'd learn together. The important thing was that they do it together. He remembered the sound of her moaning in pleasure and calling Wilcox Master.

Teeth clenched he paced their room. He picked up her pillow. It smelled like her.

He turned to the door and sprinted from their room, down the stairs, through the playrooms to the hidden door. He pounded on the door, knowing it was hopeless if Wilcox was in the inner, soundproof, room.

But the door opened. Wilcox stepped back and ushered him in, saying "How fortuitous. I was on my way to locate you."

"I can't do this," he said. "I know you said she needs this, she'd be happier like this, but I want her back. She's ... perfect, as she is. You have no idea how perfect she is. She shouldn't change."

"You cannot undo what we've started," Wilcox said, taking a seat. Roman remained standing. He looked at the door to the inner room.

"She never wanted this. I did. Give her to me. If she really needs and wants this, I'll do it for her."

"Your statement shows me that you don't understand this way of life at all." Wilcox got to his feet and went to the door. Roman stepped up, confident he could bum-rush the other man and get into the room, but he didn't open the door, instead he unlocked the cover on the control panel.

"I'm sorry to tell you that Savannah has decided to stay with me."

"What?" Roman's heart stood still. He looked at the window, then back at Wilcox. "No. No, she's coming with me."

"Perhaps it best you hear for yourself." He turned to the control panel and after a pause said, "Savannah, Master Roman is here. What is it you wanted to tell him?"

"Roman!" Her voice was tinny and crackled with static. She sounded terrified. "You're a degenerate asshole." It wasn't terror he heard in her voice, it was anger. There was a pause then, "You're pathetic, a pervert who gets off on hurting women who are better than you. You're a small-dicked asshole, and no women in her right mind would ever willingly give herself to you."

There was a click and Wilcox said, "That's enough, Savannah." He kept his back turned as he turned off the recording, then turned back to Roman, shaking his head. "You must understand, after time in my company she's realized how weak of a Dom you really are. She's angry over it. I will, of course, punish her for forgetting to call you Master. She still has a long way to go."

"Let me--let me see her," he whispered, heart breaking.

"No. You should leave. I will give you one of my slaves to toy with for the rest of your time here."

"Savannah. I have to take her home with me."

"Why? Didn't you say she's an artist? She can work here. Send her things; she can paint as a reward."

This was madness. He felt like Alice fallen through the rabbit hole. What had happened to them in the past forty-eight hours? When they'd arrived Savannah clung to him, nervous to even be naked in front of everyone, and now she was begging to stay and be trained as a slave.

He felt small and stupid. He was too weak for her. Her words, *pathetic*, *a pervert* haunted him.

"Fine, keep her," he growled and walked away.

He didn't see Wilcox opened the blinds, or the smile on his face.

Savannah lifted her head when light filled the room. She blinked in time to focus and see Wilcox in the other room. There, on the door leading out into the public playroom beyond, was Roman.

She cried out to him. She wept for her lover, her beloved, to save her, but he walked away.

The door opened. She was mentally numb. The pain and horror of everything that was happening was too much. Her nipples and clit, doused in chili oil as one last punishment before Wilcox left, felt as through the flesh were being eaten away by acid. Her entire body was sweaty and hot, save for her face, which was wet with tears.

Wilcox knelt before her a rag and a small carton of milk in his hands. He opened the box, dipped the rag in the milk and began to wipe away the oil. The relief was so great Savannah almost fainted.

"Oh yes, how very beautiful you are," he said. "Did you see who was there a moment ago?" Savannah stared into middle space and didn't answer. She wasn't being defiant; she didn't have the heart for it. She simply had no more to give. "He came to tell me something, and I'm afraid it will hurt you, more than anything I could do."

His face was sympathetic, but his eyes glittered with pleasure.

Please, no, she thought. Whatever it was that brought that look to his eye would be something horrible.

"You see, I let Master Roman use one of my slaves while I trained you. It seems he's decided he would rather have her than you."

He lies.

"He's told me to keep you."

Roman loves her.

"You don't believe it, I understand. Perhaps it is best you hear it yourself." He pulled a small recorder from his pocket.

"Keep her."

Savannah's heart broke. She screamed and screamed, letting out the anguish that rolled from her. She'd been betrayed, utterly, terribly, betrayed--by the man she loved. He'd lured her in, convinced her to try and do things she normally wouldn't, and in the end he threw her away, like so much garbage.

He took out the ball gag so her screams echoed through the chamber. He unbuckled her, slapping her and laughing as she struggled to get away. She'd been depending on Roman, on his coming for her. This trip had been for the weekend, nothing more, and she'd been able to hold on to the idea that there would be an end to her torture. But now that hope was gone.

Wilcox didn't see the couple standing in the playroom, their eyes wide as they looked through the open door into the training room. He didn't see the look in their eyes when they realized she was far from willing. He didn't see them watching as he strapped her face-down on the table and beat her ass with a paddle before forcing a monstrous plug into her ass.

He didn't see them hide as he left the room, nor did he know they watched him hang a ring of keys to a hook hidden behind a painting.

The Stalwoods waited for Mr. Wilcox to leave before they retrieved the keys and let themselves in to the room. They took Savannah away, scooping her up like a broken doll. When she begged them, in a voice nearly gone from all the screaming, to take her away from here they did. When she told Karen that Roman had done this, had given her to Wilcox, traded her for one of Wilcox's own slaves, they smuggled her out of the house into their car. They stopped only long enough for Robert to grab his wallet and keys, and for Karen to take the video from the playroom.

She'd seen the cameras, mounted in the corners of the room. A moment of ripping the room apart revealed a computer station hidden in an alcove behind the painting. She took the DVD's labeled "Slave S training" and wiped the files from the hard drive.

They took Savannah home to LA. They broke into the condo she shared with Roman to get her things, leaving a note. She'd written it in a shaking hand.

Don't ever contact me.

Roman found the note. Wilcox said Savannah had run away. She'd run from Wilcox, but not back to him. He called and emailed, talking to their friends. He searched for her, desperate to talk to her, to have her back.

Once, just once he got a hold of her. She was at her parent's house in Colorado, and she answered the phone.

"Savannah," he said in relief.

There was a pause, then, "Don't ever call me again."

"Wait, whatever it is you need I can be--" Dial tone.

He left LA. He couldn't stay there. The golden light of dusk reminded him of her. He moved to Chicago where the light was different, where the cold wind cut through bone. He became harder, stronger. He closed off his heart, stayed away from the scene for years, but then went back, to test himself. There were still elements of it he found arousing to watch, but his desire to participate was gone.

He watched others play and wondered at what might have been. He never forgot her, and he never stopped loving her.

She moved away. She stayed with the Stalwoods long enough to heal, then went to her parents in Colorado. She told them she'd broken up with Roman. When pressed, she said he'd cheated on her.

She stopped painting.

She moved to Savannah, the town she was named after but had never lived in. Her grandparents let her turn their barn into a massive art studio. She took up sculpture. When her grandparents died within months of each other, she used the money they left her to turn her studio into a sort of co-op, building a painting studio on the side.

She never dated. Sex was something to be done after a night of heavy drinking, with a man whose name she wouldn't remember. She wanted nothing to do with the BDSM world, but could not stay away. She started by going to clubs, watching. Then, one night, hounded by the memory of her torture, she agreed to play with a male sub. The sub's Domme offered him to Savannah, saying with a wink that he'd been naughty. She hadn't realized the other people in the room thought she was a Domme.

She took, using his leash to draw him to her, and the darkness that lived within her swelled up. In the end, when he was panting with the combination of pain and pleasure—for despite all she'd suffered Savannah wouldn't give only pain—he'd gone back to his Domme who'd hugged and kissed him.

It became her obsession, taking other subs close to the dark she'd known. They didn't know how real their peril was. They came to her already aroused because they expected the experience to be erotic.

A leatherworker who for a time had space in her studios made her the suit. She became anonymous then. She was invited to attend shows at clubs across the country. Between the monthly sessions as a Domme and the ongoing rape counseling, she healed. Her art improved. She became commercially successful.

But she never dealt with the issue of Roman. She hadn't revealed that part of the story to her counselor. Though she came to understand that what had happened to her wasn't her fault, she never forgave Roman.

The 'why' ate away at her like a cancer. Why would he do that? What in her was so forgettable, so unlovable, that the man she'd loved with an abiding passion had been willing to give her away, like a broken toy?

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Chapter Twelve

Current Day

"Peter, just give me her address."

"What's going on?"

"I ... I know her. From LA."

"Whoa, is she the girl you talk about sometimes?"

"I don't talk about her."

"Four neat whiskies and you do. The beautiful artist."

"Something like that. Just give me the address."

"I emailed it to you. She lives in Savannah."

Savannah. He'd always teased her about being named for a city she didn't live in. Her grandparents were there. He would have looked for her there, if the call from Colorado hadn't stopped him.

He boarded a plane the next afternoon.

Savannah picked up her car and the airport and drove home, going too fast. Her phone beeped and she picked it up, reading a text message from Karen. *On our way. Don't leave.*

She'd contacted them, telling them she'd run into Roman. She hadn't known who else to call.

Back in her studio she paced the floor. When pacing wasn't enough, she rolled out a huge piece of butcher's paper on the smooth wood floor and started to sketch. She drew a woman, larger than life size, her arms and legs distorted and disjointed like a Picasso. Manacles around her wrists, ankles and neck attached to chains.

Roman held the chains. Unlike the woman he was lifelike. She tested herself, seeing how accurately she could render him after all these years.

He was handing the chain to a gaunt figure in a white dress shirt. She drew Wilcox salivating, his eyes wide with longing. She made him a pathetic, comical creature.

Savannah sketched through the afternoon, unaware of her surroundings.

He rented a car and bought a map, told himself he wanted to talk to her, wanted to confront her, but it was a lie.

You betrayed me. You murdered me.

He found her address, a beautiful old farmhouse holding court amid acres of farm land. He turned left between white gateposts and started up the shrub-lined drive, but didn't get far.

A black sedan was stopped on the drive, parked at an angle so he couldn't get past. Two people leaned against the back. Roman got out of the car.

"Karen? Robert?" It took him a minute to identify the Stalwoods. Robert had gained some weight, Karen's hair was going grey, but he couldn't mistake his former friends. He'd contacted them asking if they'd seen Savannah, but they said they hadn't. Less than six months later, they left LA when Karen was transferred to Richmond.

"Roman," Robert said coolly. Karen glared at him. He stopped walking, then looked at the house, barely visible through the tall trees.

"What's going on?" he asked.

"What are you doing here?" Robert returned.

The ball of dread that that been slowly forming in Roman's stomach solidified. "You never lost contact with her," he said, putting the pieces together. "Are you the ones who taught her to be a Dominatrix?"

They didn't reply. Karen looked away, her face drawn in lines of grief.

He took a deep breath as some of the pieces started clicking together. "What happened five years ago?"

Robert nodded, as if that's what he'd been waiting for. "I don't think anyone but Wilcox knows for sure."

"Wilcox and Savannah."

"No," Karen said. "I suspect that neither of you really know what happened. We thought about telling her, showing her, after, but she was so broken."

"Showing her?"

Robert plucked a bag from the trunk of the car. "He filmed everything that went on in that room," he said.

"I took the DVDs, deleted the files from his computer."

"We started to watch it once, but..." Robert looked at Karen. "It was too much. What he did to her. You'd better see it."

They handed Roman a small portable DVD player and headphones. Roman felt as if he'd finally woken up, after years of sleep. He took the player, slipped the headphones over his ears.

Roman watched himself lead Savannah into the room. She was so beautiful. He watched as he strapped her down, saw the smile on her face that she tried to hide. He watched himself kiss her goodbye. If he'd known then it was the final one he would have lingered.

He left the room, Wilcox stepped forward, bringing the vibrator into play. Its humming was faint, but then Savannah moaned his name. He was startled by the sound of it from her lips, and at first that's all he could concentrate on. She moaned his name again and frowned. Why was she calling out to him? He was gone.

She didn't know. The blindfold was still on, and she didn't know it was Wilcox.

"No," he whispered.

He heard her moaning for her Master to pleasure her. Words he thought were addressed to Wilcox had been meant for him.

He watched fear fill her when the blindfold was removed, heard her cry out for him, begging him to save her.

His heart, which he'd thought long broken, shattered. There was the woman he loved, crying out for him, begging him to rescue her--from a situation he'd forced her into.

He watched, made himself watch, what was done to her. He understood the full extent when he heard her condemning Wilcox, calling him a perverted freak. He'd heard those words, but not *let me go you pathetic son of a bitch*.

How brave she was to fight, even after all that he'd done to her.

When he left her in the dark, her body twitching in pain, he knew what would follow. He knew he was about to be played for a fool. Wilcox had wanted Savannah, and he'd done everything to get her.

He watched, tears on his face, as Wilcox held up a small recorder. He heard himself say, "Keep her."

Savannah's grief was terrible to behold. She'd gone there with him, wanting nothing from the weekend, but willing to indulge him. She'd found pleasure, and become an enthusiastic participant, and in reward he'd turned her over to a sadistic monster.

He watched as Wilcox left and the Stalwoods snuck in. The tape ended with Karen trashing the place.

The DVD stopped, returning to a blue screen.

Roman put the player on the gravel. At some point he'd sunk to his knees. He pressed the heels of his hands to his eyes.

"I didn't know," he whispered. It sounded like an excuse and he hated himself for it. He owed her so much. "I should have. I should have seen what he was doing."

"What did he tell you?" Karen asked softly.

"He told me she wanted to stay with him. He said I was too weak for her." He shook his head. "It doesn't matter what I thought. I loved her. I should have protected her."

Karen stood and ushered him into the car. They drove him up to the house.

"She'll be in the barn," Karen said.

Roman walked to the barn. The words he'd composed on the flight were gone. He'd planed to approach her civilly, address their past and say he'd wished she would have just told him if she wanted to be a Domme, rather than run away from him. He would have liked to remain friends...

What a blind, arrogant fool he'd been. He'd been so overwhelmed by events, so blinded by his presumed failings and then the hurt of her leaving that he hadn't seen what was in front of him.

He stood in front of the door to the barn, hoping words would come. He wanted to apologize, to beg her forgiveness, to wrap her in his arms and protect her from the past.

You murdered me.

He could tell her that he hadn't known, that it had been a mistake, but it was he who had led her into that room, he who had strapped her to the table.

He pushed open the door, still without a clue what to say.

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Chapter Thirteen

Savannah stood, wiping her hands on a cloth. She felt calmer than she had in a long time, maybe than she had in five years.

"Savannah."

His voice didn't surprise her, and she realized she'd been expecting it. There he was, in the golden light of sunset, highlights dancing in his chestnut hair.

"Savannah," he said, and his image wavered. She blinked and tears slid down her cheeks.

The sunlight left his face in shadow and, in that moment, when the world seemed to wait, she saw before her not the man she'd met again last night, nor the man she'd been betrayed by all those years ago, but the boy she fell in love with.

"Roman?" she whispered.

"Savannah." He ran to her, scooping her up in his arms. Savannah buried her face in his neck and sobbed. Something in his voice brought her back, back to when she was with the man she'd always loved.

His tears dampened her shoulder; his sobs carried them to the floor.

"I didn't know. I didn't know. He hurt you. I saw him hurt you. I was there, just on the other side of the door. I didn't know. I'm sorry, so sorry I didn't come for you."

She didn't understand him, but she didn't care, not right then. She pressed her fingers to his lips to silence him. He kissed her fingertips, then tentatively brought his lips to her. He held there, a breath away from kissing her.

Finally she understood that he was waiting, letting it be her choice.

She kissed him, tentative, as a first kiss. His taste was familiar, but changed by their years of separation. She broke away to look at him. He was not the boy she'd fallen in love. There were lines at the corners of his eyes, as she'd always imagined.

This was a dream, an illusion.

Savannah rolled away, turning her back on him. How sickly masochistic she was to still love the man who had betrayed her so cruelly.

"Will you let me talk? Please. I'll leave whenever you want. All you have to do is tell me to go and I'll be gone. But please, let me talk to you. We've wasted so much time... I think you deserve answers from me."

"I've learned to live without them," she said, back still to him.

"The Stalwoods are outside."

"I know. They rescued me. Took a job on this coast to be close to me."

"I should have rescued you," he said, voice low with conviction.

She threw her head back and barked out a laugh. How bitterly sweet it was to hear him say that.

"That would have been nice," she whispered. "But instead you gave me to that monster." She rose to her feet, looked down at her sketch. "I cried out for you. I begged you to save me."

"I know. I heard."

She rubbed her belly, trying to draw breath past the coldness there. "You heard me begging for mercy, and decided to trade me for his whore?"

"God, no! Savannah no. I didn't hear it then, not five years ago. I had no idea. He told me ... I guess it doesn't matter what he told me. I should have known he was lying. I should have protected you. I heard just now. I swear to you, I didn't know."

How could he have heard? She turned to see the Stalwoods standing in the doorway. She motioned them in and Karen came to her immediately

"After we got you out of there, I went back into that room. There were cameras in the ceiling. I found a video recording of what he'd done to you. I stole the DVDs and erased the files from the computer." She rubbed Savannah's back gently. "We started to watch them, once, but we couldn't continue. It was enough, though, to make us think there might be more to the story than what Wilcox told you."

"Why would you watch them?"

"You were nearly catatonic. I wanted to know what had been done to you, if there was anything specific we should take you to a doctor for."

"What made you suspicious?"

Karen shook her head. "Nothing specific. Because we didn't really know anything, we never told you. Once you were healing, we didn't think it would help. When you told me how Roman reacted last night, though, it made me wonder."

Savannah looked at Roman. "I still don't understand."

"Then let him tell you."

Robert led Roman over then took his wife by the hand. "Karen love, how about we go find some dinner for the four of us."

"Town's far away," Savannah said faintly, eyes on Roman.

"Then that'll give you some time. We'll be back in a couple hours." He handed Roman a bag. "In case you need it."

The Stalwoods left. Savannah stood in her gallery, surrounded by questions she hadn't known she needed to ask.

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Chapter Fourteen

Roman set the bag on the ground and looked around the gallery.

"Are these yours?" he asked, frowning at a half-finished painting on an easel.

"No. I don't paint anymore."

"They don't look like your work." He wandered from easel to easel, ending at her desk area where one of the sketches for the sculpture she was making for his building lay. It was a rough drawing, not nice enough to have been included in the portfolio.

"I recognized us in this," he said. "That's what made me come after you. Even after I saw the artist's name, I didn't think it was you. Your work was never like this. But it's us, isn't it?"

"It is."

"The knife in his hand, my hand. The murder weapon?"

"She's not dead," Savannah said, tracking him with her eyes.

"But she is. Last night you said 'you murdered me.'"

She looked away, didn't answer.

He set the sketch down and came towards her. He didn't touch her and she was grateful for that. "I kept all your paintings. Your clothes. I took the paintings with me when I moved to Chicago. Your clothes, books, they're all boxed up in storage. I couldn't throw anything away. I thought you left me because I was weak, and you wanted a strong man, a Dom."

"How could you think that?" she asked, rubbing her cold arms. "You gave me away, *traded* me to *him* in exchange for one of his slaves." She spit the last word out, hating the taste of it.

"Savannah, look at me, please." He waited until she'd met his gaze. "I loved you. You were my world. You were the only person I'd ever trusted enough to try sex games with, but if you hadn't like them, I would have given them up in a heartbeat. For you."

"No, no, that's not right." She paced away, heart beating hard. Hope, a traitorous emotion, was rising within her. "You took me there, tricked me. Gave me to him."

"You're right. I did take you there, to that room."

It was almost a relief when the hope died.

"But I did not give you to him."

"I heard you, heard you tell him to keep me."

He shook his head. "I took you there, because I thought you would enjoy it. He convinced me that you were some sort of ... born submissive. He said he would teach you to go into sub-space--God how stupid this all sounds now--he said he would help me make it so that each time I touched you it would be as good as that night. I felt stupid because it wasn't until you were surrounded by other people, and I was being coached, that I was able to give you that kind of pleasure. I thought I wasn't doing enough to you. He said that if he trained you to find sub-space, it could be like that all the time.

"I made him swear not to hurt you. He couldn't have sex with you. I wanted to give you a chance to know pleasure at the hands of a skilled Dom. And yes, I thought you would enjoy it, and when it was over you'd come back to me, and I'd have learned new things, and we would both be happier.

"I stood outside the door. I stood there and waited to make sure you were okay. I heard you, heard you calling him Master and moaning as you came."

"No, no. I never came for him. I thought it was you."

"He told me that he'd take the blindfold off the minute I was gone. I didn't hear you calling my name, didn't know it was me you were calling Master."

"But," Savannah sucked in a breath as the implications of his words came tumbling down around her. The sky itself was crashing down around her. "But that means..." She pressed her hands to her face as sobs wracked through her.

"Roman," she cried out. "Roman."

"I'm here." He scooped her up, holding her with strong arms. He whispered into her hair as she wept. He made promises that he could not keep--he would never leave her, nothing bad would ever happen to her--but they were what she needed to hear.

When her sobs died, he showed her the video. She was scared, and he turned it off several times, but she got through it. She couldn't always watch, but she listened. There were moments where the sounds of her screams brought to her back to that place, and the remembered pain was nearly as fresh as the original, but through it all he held her.

As they watched, he narrated what she had not been able to see. He standing just outside, hearing her curse him. He returning for her only to be told she'd decided to stay. He telling Wilcox to keep her to save face.

"All this time," she whispered as the video ended. "All these years."

There was nothing to say to that. They'd each lived in a hell of their own making.

"I hate that you've had to live with this all this time."

"I can't talk about it anymore."

Her skin felt sensitive, as if every inch of it was new--healing from a wound.

"Can I touch you?" he asked softly.

"I--I don't enjoy sex anymore."

"Nor do I. Not really."

"What if we can't ever be the way we were?"

"Then we'll have to find new people to be."

"There's no one in your life," she asked, somewhat belatedly.

"No, there's never been anyone serious. You?"

"The same. I have trouble trusting people," she said, smiling wryly. Roman barked out a laugh and hugged her.

The sound of his laugh was so familiar and welcome she found herself smiling genuinely. The hug turned to petting. Roman lay her on her back, her hair spreading across the floor. The undressed each other slowly.

Roman kissed each place Wilcox had hurt, easing the memory of that terrible ordeal from her skin. Tears slipped from his eyes when he drew her jeans off, exposing her thighs, which were permanently marked from the cane.

When she was comfortable with him, and his touches brought forth an emotion stronger than comfort, Savannah touched him. His cock hardened at her touch.

He scooted lower, kissing his way down her belly until his mouth was on her sex. He brought her to a slow, gentle orgasm with his fingers and tongue. He eased one, then two fingers into her. She was tight. It had been a long time.

With ripples of pleasure still gliding through her, she pulled Roman to her. His chest settled on hers, his hips a warm weight between her legs. Together they positioned themselves so his cock was in place.

With gentle pressure, he slid into her.

"I don't think I ever stopped loving you," he said. There was sweat on his forehead, and his eyes were stark.

She wrapped one leg over his ass, urging him to move just a bit faster. "I hated you, the man I thought you were. But I never stopped loving the Roman I'd first fallen in love with."

He came first, whispering apologies, but she liked it. She liked feeling him lose control and fall to pieces.

With his cock still in her he shifted his weight to one side so he could reach between her legs. His fingers on her clit, his cock in her, and his eyes on her face, brought her to orgasm.

They dressed and she gave him a tour of her pottery studio. As they toured the room they told their individual stories of the past five years. The Stalwoods returned with bags of take out.

She led them into the house, where they ate around her grandparents' dining room table, before the Stalwoods departed, leaving Savannah and Roman alone.

"Would you like to stay?" she asked.

"Yes. This is a beautiful house. A good place."

"I feel safe here."

"There's property to be developed in Georgia. I could...I can move my business here."

"That's good," she said. Together they cleared the plates. "But I need time."

"Then I'll give you time. I'll buy a place in the city. We'll date." He said it with such excitement that she couldn't help, but laugh.

"Don't you think we're past dating?"

"All I know is that whatever it takes, whatever you need, I'll give it to you."

She set down her stack of plates and leaned back on the counter. "I think you mean that."

"I've never meant anything more."

"I don't know if I'll ever want kinky sex again. Sometimes, when I was at the clubs, I would see something I found ... inspiring, but I don't know."

"That doesn't matter. I don't need that."

"Are you sure? After all, you were at that club." She raised a brow. "That was a member's only club."

"I go, but only to watch. I've felt so ... dead inside, that I went looking for anything that might stir me. Just seeing you again was more pleasurable than anything I could imagine."

Savannah had the urge to throw up more roadblocks, to find a way to make this not work. It would be easier, safer, than letting him back into her life.

"Roman, I just don't know." She rubbed her arms.

"If you want me to go, I will. But I hope you'll let me stay. Have I told you how cute the accent is?"

Savannah laughed. They cleaned the kitchen and turned out the lights. She led him upstairs, where he sat on the counter while she showered, telling her stories, keeping her laughing.

That night, Savannah went to sleep lying beside the man she loved.

She woke up smiling.

The End

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About the Author:

Lila lives in Hollywood, after a six months stint terrorizing a sleepy little town in Surrey, England. Lila is current dieting (which makes her grumpy) because she's getting married summer 2010. Having spent extensive time in France, Egypt and Turkey, and England Lila speaks five languages, none of them (including English) fluently.

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