

Relationship S&M

by Jennifer Donnell

Sam pours me a glass of wine, merlot, though I'm not advanced enough to discern its difference with a good cabernet. I came to see him on a whim, as sometimes our schedules fit together last minute. In the haste to get to his home at a reasonable hour, dusk saying its goodbye, I left my freshly washed blonde hair curly. In our age of blow drying and Brazilian blowouts, this sometimes takes high self esteem. Sam's own hair is shorter than it was in our twenties, wavy brown across his Mediterranean complexion. He's half Greek and proud of it. I cross my grey skinny jean clad legs and lean back into his oversized sofa, feeling tiny, as it fills half of his giant formal living room. His house is nice- big and beige, airy, five miles from the beach and the ceilings are high. Even as kids he had goals of grandeur, while I seemed meant to be the paycheck to paycheck artistic type and still am. His children are upstairs with his best friend, nanny, slave, I'm not sure what she is to him these day.

"Slave." he tells me, when I ask, adding that he likes the fact that she sleeps in her own bed, prepares his meals wearing stilettos and will be blindfolded and naked when he arrives home from work, should he ask.

I focus on the wine and swirl it, watching the burgundy purple wash up the sides of the glass like a wave. I'm out to sea in my thoughts, but rein myself back in.

"Don't you think wine is a 30's thing?" I feel the buzz of half a glass take hold and tell him about all the women I know who, on the surface, are normal suburban moms but underneath are, what I like to call, "Wine-aholics."

"Completely!" he agrees enthusiastically, which is the nice part of us being almost the same age.

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We contrast the occasional binge drinking of youth, with our ability to enjoy a glass or two of wine in moderation.

"It's one of the things I look for." he insists, lowering his voice so his slave doesn't overhear, "a lot of younger women can't hold their liquor."

He shows me the latest gal he's been seeing, a 24 year old debutante. Since we've never had a physical attraction, I don't get angry at him like I do when I hear about my ex-husband doing the same. I compliment her sleek brown hairstyle and ask if he will still keep his slave.

"Absolutely. I get better at it all the time." he replies, confident. He reminds me that it was all her idea. They were online friends when she suggested it. "She loves it." he tells me again, though I think of her sad eyes as she walked upstairs to tend to his children while he stayed up to talk to me.

"I think she loves you." I suggest, unsure of the rules for s&m and love.

He shrugs.

"Maybe you'll end up together." I continue, ever the romantic. "Remember? You used to want true love and a slave seems like a safe way to avoid getting hurt."

He asks if I want a second glass and admits he never thought about it that way before. He pours the second, a different bottle, same merlot.

I tell him about my broken heart, the man I miss, then joke if he knows any handsome rich guys to help soothe my pain.

"I thought you liked artists?" Sam is quick to quip back and sounds disappointed, as if I've become a heathen to real love myself and ruined his pure image of me.

"Liked." I breathe out in a sigh, jaded from the failed love affairs of the past.

His slave brings us dessert, her long skinny legs an extension of her too high heels. Sam shows me a blonde divorced contractor whose sons ride BMX and says I might like him.

"Cute." I quip, already worrying about wearing helmets on the back of his bike.

"You look so young for your age." he compliments, halfway through his second glass. His slave overhears from the dishes and shoots him a sideways glance, jealous.

I consider all she does for him to live in a big house and realize I did all the same things for my ex, without the perks of a wardrobe and riches.

I tell Sam this and that I massaged my ex every night.

"Every night?" he seems impressed and adds, "That's pretty good!"

His slave looks over again, worried that I added to her expected duties, like Cinderella who wishes she could lose a shoe.

