

The first time Jana Grae Peterson saw Caleb, he was getting out of a taxi on Rittenhouse Square. She stared out of the Borders window, transfixed, the coffee mug in her hand forgotten. At first, she thought he must be a celebrity: his muscles had the perfect lines of young masculinity; his clothes were professional and stylish; and his face was familiar, as if she had seen him before on television... or in a dream.

Within moments, he was lost in the crowd, leaving Jana with a strange sense of loss. But she knew, somehow, that she would see him again.

It would not be long. The following day, Tony, a rare books seller and one of Jana's clients, took her out to lunch. As they discussed small business matters, he suddenly stopped mid-sentence and stood, smiling towards the door.

"Caleb," Tony greeted. "Please, will you join us? Jana, this is Caleb, an old... friend of mine. Caleb, this is Jana Grae Peterson, president of the *Beyond Grayscale* agency that I told you about."

If Caleb noted Tony's hesitation to call him a friend, he showed no sign of it. His attention appeared focused completely on Jana.

"A pleasure to make your acquaintance," he said, extending his hand.

She reached out and clasped it, to accept the handshake, but he unexpectedly turned his strong grasp and bent slightly, drawing her hand to his mouth. As he kissed the back of her hand, his eyes remained locked on her face.

The touch of his lips to her flesh was electrifying. Even though she knew he was watching her reaction, she could not stop it. Her pulse quickened. Her cheeks flushed. Her lips parted as she drew in a quick, sharp breath.

He smiled at his effect on her. Then he released her hand, made excuses that Jana's memory did not hear, and departed.

Some kind of battle had begun. And Jana knew, instinctually, that the prize for the victor would be neither her heart nor her body, but rather her very soul.

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"In some cultures, black is evil and white is good," Caleb said, lazily swirling the wine glass in his hand. "In others, it is reversed. But gray, Jana... gray always stands between them."

Jana took a sip from her own wine glass, studying him. It was not the first time he was a guest in her apartment, and she doubted it would be the last. Soon after they met, he had called her agency and contracted a small media project for his children's book company. Their relationship had since journeyed far from its professional origins, but had not yet achieved the level of intimacy that Jana desired.

They sat together on her leather sofa, not quite close enough to touch. Jana set her glass down on the coffee table, using the motion to slide a few inches closer to him.

He draped an arm over the back of the sofa, turning his torso towards her. She read the opening in his body language and moved closer still.

"Gray is considered a neutral color, a bland color," she said softly. "But the eye can be tricked into perceiving color in a gray object, by merely manipulating the temperature of the light."

He took a slow sip of wine, studying her. He licked his lips before speaking. "And so gray becomes, not true to itself, but a product of its environment."

She was so close that she could feel the warmth radiating from his skin. "Why won't you kiss me?" she asked.

He smiled. "Because you don't want me to."

"I think I do."

His smile widened. "I know your desires better than you know them yourself."

She snorted. "Presumptuous," she said, sliding angrily back to her side of the sofa.

To her surprise, he laughed. "You seek to taste that kind of pleasure as if sipping wine," he said. "But you do not truly like passion like that. You are the kind of woman who needs to be consumed by it."

"Nonsense," she said, wishing she could conjure a more believable retort.

"Oh, yes, I know your desires," Caleb said, leaning closer to her. "You want to be taken... conquered... ravaged." Her heart thudded as her imagination filled in the gaps between his words. He slid closer still. "It is in our nature to be driven mad with lust, for reproduction perpetuates a species at the expense of its individuals. Pleasure is the reward for our self-sacrifice." He moved ever closer, until he was almost on top of her. "I know what you want, Jana. But there can be no timid wading in these waters. You must give yourself to me completely... or not at all."

Her body screamed for his touch, but he withheld it, holding himself mere inches away, the heat of his breath caressing her face. Through the haze of desire, Jana's reason tried to shout warnings at her, but she ignored them.

"Yes," she said, not in answer to any question, but in a general granting of consent.

"Completely?" he whispered.

She shuddered. "Yes."

Her submission was absolute. She would give anything to have him.

Without further words, he pulled her to him, pressing his mouth over hers, fulfilling her need. His passion was filled with a primal, angry strength that exhilarated her.

Never before had a man taken her to such heights of pleasure. Unbridled moans of passion emanated from her, beyond her control.

After he had her on the sofa, he moved her roughly to the floor and took her again. In past sexual encounters, she had traded off dominance with her lovers, but there was no question this time that Caleb was in control. That she was his. And that he did, in fact, know her desires better than she herself.

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The next morning, Jana's eyelids fluttered open in the confused landscape between memory and dream. She was in bed, which surprised her. Caleb was with her, which surprised her more.

Memories returned to her, more of sensations than events. Sensations that she hungered to experience again.

His eyes opened, and his gaze was lucid. Jana knew he must have been awake for some time.

She snuggled close to him, which he accepted, nestling her in the crook of his arm.

“Again?” she smiled suggestively, stroking his chest.

He laughed. “No.”

“Why not?” she asked petulantly. It was Saturday, and she knew he had no appointments that day.

“Because I choose not to,” he said nonchalantly. He fondled a lock of her hair between his thumb and forefinger. “When it comes to sex between us, I am in complete control. You find this frustrating but highly erotic. And so, you await my pleasure to experience your own pleasure again.”

She frowned, validating the prediction of frustration, but unsure about the rest. She was not the kind of woman who was accustomed to waiting on a man’s whims.

“What did you dream about?” Caleb asked unexpectedly.

Jana shrugged. “I don’t usually remember my dreams.”

“Not at all?” he asked, with a slight tone of disbelief. “Not even a color, a sensation? A person, or a place?”

Images flashed across Jana’s inner eye. “Ephrata,” she said reflexively. “I was in Ephrata.”

Even as she said it, Jana found this extremely strange. Specifically, she remembered dreaming that she was at the Ephrata Cloister. But she had not remembered the dream at all until Caleb asked about it.

More memories flooded her. A voice... an urgency... and a warning.

Caleb looked at her expectantly, but she did not want to share the rest with him. “The details are fuzzy,” she said dismissively. “Probably just memories of the last time I visited my uncle.”

She rolled out of bed, suddenly forming plans for the day that did not involve him. Ephrata was only about an hour and a half away. She needed to go there.

She jumped when she felt his hands grasp her upper arms. How had he gotten behind her so quickly? She struggled to free herself, but she was powerless against his strength. He immobilized her effortlessly.

“Where are you off to, my little Grae?” he asked quietly.

“The shower,” she lied, trying to swallow her fear. There was something foreign in his manner, as if he was showing a side of him she had never seen before. “Since you’re done with me for today –”

She gasped as his grip tightened, hurting her.

“I didn’t say that,” he said. “In fact, I think today would be an excellent opportunity for us to spend more time together.” He released his grip but wrapped his arms around her before she could move. Under different circumstances, she would have considered it an affectionate embrace. “I’ve always meant to go to Ephrata, to visit the Cloister. What do you say we go there today?”

She struggled to remain in control of her senses. There was no logical reason to be afraid of him. There was no reason to believe the warning in her dream had anything to do with him. Or even that it meant anything at all. It was just a dream, after all. “Sure, that sounds great,” she said.

He nuzzled her hair. “I’ll drive.”

The previous day, she would have been gleeful at the chance to spend her weekend with Caleb. But, after this morning, she felt... trapped.

The voice from her dream echoed in her head. “You’re in danger, Jana Grae,” it said. “Grave danger...”