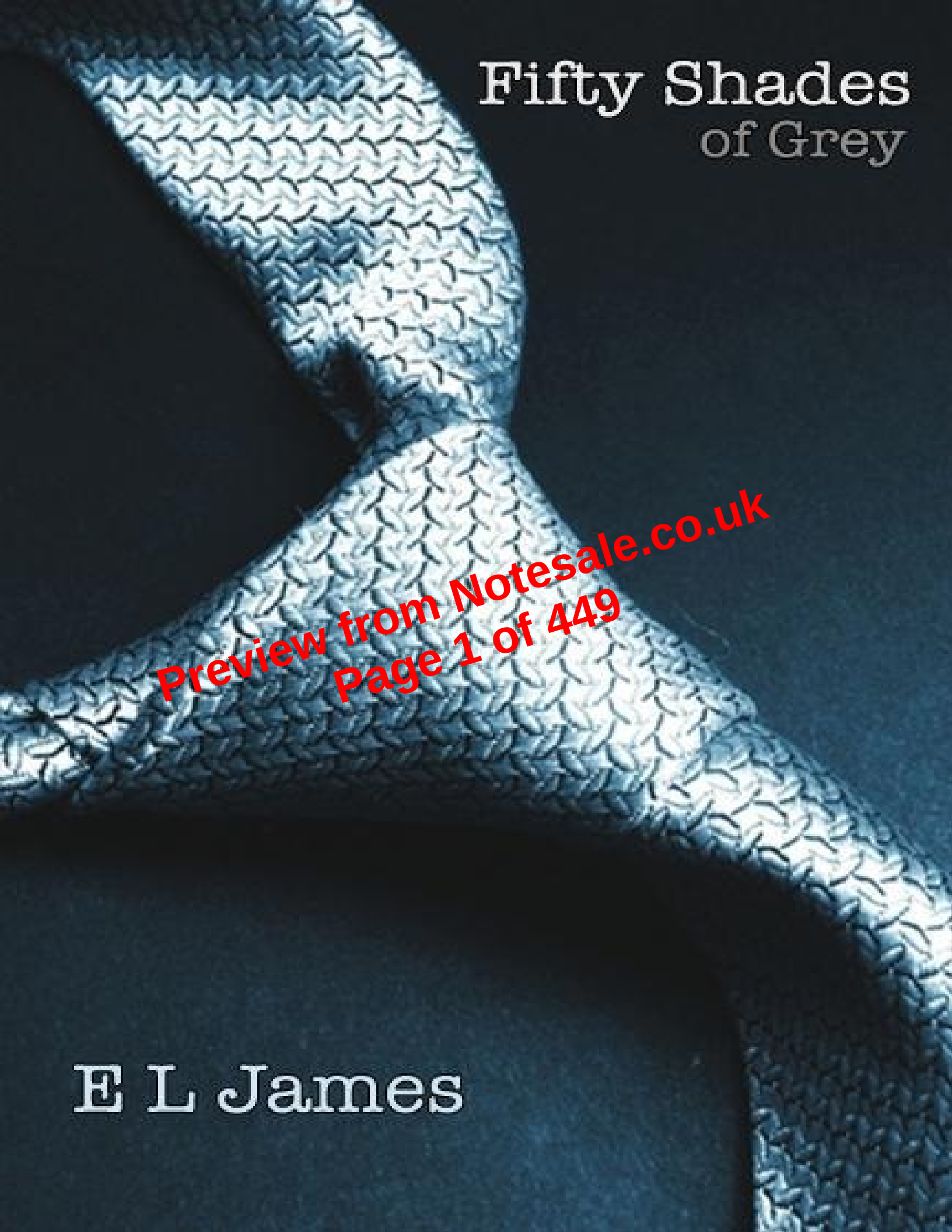




Fifty Shades of Grey

Preview from Notesale.co.uk
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E L James

“Um. Actually—” I mutter. If this guy is over thirty then I’m a monkey’s uncle. In a daze, I place my hand in his and we shake. As our fingers touch, I feel an odd exhilarating shiver run through me. I withdraw my hand hastily, embarrassed. Must be static. I blink rapidly, my eyelids matching my heart rate.

“Miss Kavanagh is indisposed, so she sent me. I hope you don’t mind, Mr. Grey.”

“And you are?” His voice is warm, possibly amused, but it’s difficult to tell from his impassive expression. He looks mildly interested, but above all, polite.

“Anastasia Steele. I’m studying English Literature with Kate, um... Katherine...

um... Miss Kavanagh at Washington State.”

“I see,” he says simply. I think I see the ghost of a smile in his expression, but I’m not sure. “Would you like to sit?” He waves me toward a white leather buttoned L-shaped couch.

His office is way too big for just one man. In front of the floor-to-ceiling windows, there’s a huge modern dark-wood desk that six people could comfortably eat around. It matches the coffee table by the couch. Everything else is white – ceiling, floors, and walls except, on the wall by the door, where a mosaic of small paintings hang, thirty-six of them arranged in a square. They are exquisite – a series of mundane, forgotten objects painted in such precise detail they look like photographs. Displayed together, they are breathtaking.

“A local artist. Trouton,” says Grey when he catches my gaze.

“They’re lovely. Raising the ordinary to extraordinary,” I murmur, distracted both by him and the paintings. He cocks his head to one side and regards me intently.

“I couldn’t agree more, Miss Steele,” he replies, his voice soft and for some inexplicable reason I find myself blushing.

Apart from the paintings, the rest of the office is cold, clean, and clinical. I wonder if it reflects the personality of the Adonis who sinks gracefully into one of the white leather chairs opposite me. I shake my head, disturbed at the direction of my thoughts, and retrieve Kate’s questions from my satchel. Next, I set up the mini-disc recorder and am all fingers and thumbs, dropping it twice on the coffee table in front of me. Mr. Grey says nothing, waiting patiently – I hope – as I become increasingly embarrassed and flustered. When I pluck up the courage to look at him, he’s watching me, one hand relaxed in his lap and the other cupping his chin and trailing his long index finger across his lips. I think he’s trying to suppress a smile.

“Sorry,” I stutter. “I’m not used to this.”

“Take all the time you need, Miss Steele,” he says.

“Do you mind if I record your answers?”

“After you’ve taken so much trouble to set up the recorder – you ask me now?”

“Do you feel that you have immense power?” *Control Freak*.

“I employ over forty thousand people, Miss Steele. That gives me a certain sense of responsibility – power, if you will. If I were to decide I was no longer interested in the telecommunications business and sell up, twenty thousand people would struggle to make their mortgage payments after a month or so.”

My mouth drops open. I am staggered by his lack of humility.

“Don’t you have a board to answer to?” I ask, disgusted.

“I own my company. I don’t have to answer to a board.” He raises an eyebrow at me.

I flush. Of course, I would know this if I had done some research. But holy crap, he’s so arrogant. I change tack.

“And do you have any interests outside your work?”

“I have varied interests, Miss Steele.” A ghost of a smile touches his lips. “Very varied.” And for some reason, I’m confounded and heated by his steady gaze. His eyes are alight with some wicked thought.

“But if you work so hard, what do you do to chill out?”

“Chill out?” He smiles, revealing perfect white teeth. I stop breathing. He really is beautiful. No one should be this good-looking.

“Well, to ‘chill out’ as you put it – I bathe. I fly, I indulge in various physical pursuits.”

He shifts in his chair. “I’m a very wealthy man, Miss Steele, and I have expensive and absorbing hobbies.”

I glance quickly at Kate’s questions, wanting to get off this subject.

“You invest in manufacturing. Why, specifically?” I ask. Why does he make me so uncomfortable?

“I like to build things. I like to know how things work: what makes things tick, how to construct and deconstruct. And I have a love of ships. What can I say?”

“That sounds like your heart talking rather than logic and facts.”

His mouth quirks up, and he stares appraisingly at me.

“Possibly. Though there are people who’d say I don’t have a heart.”

“Why would they say that?”

“Because they know me well.” His lip curls in a wry smile.

“I suppose so.” I try hard to sound disinterested, and I think I succeed.

“Oh come on, Ana – even you can’t be immune to his looks.” She arches a perfect eyebrow at me.

Crap! I distract her with flattery, always a good ploy.

“You probably would have got a lot more out of him.”

“I doubt that, Ana. Come on – he practically offered you a job. Given that I foisted this on you at the last minute, you did very well.” She glances up at me speculatively. I make a hasty retreat into the kitchen.

“So what did you really think of him?” Damn, she’s inquisitive. Why can’t she just let this go? *Think of something – quick.*

“He’s very driven, controlling, arrogant – scary really, but very charismatic. I can understand the fascination,” I add truthfully, as I peer round the door at her hoping this will shut her up once and for all.

“You, fascinated by a man? That’s a first,” she snorts.

I start gathering the makings of a sandwich so she can’t see my face.

“Why did you want to know if he was gay? Incidentally, that was the most embarrassing question. I was mortified, and he was pissed to be asked too.” I scowl at my memory.

“Whenever he’s in the society pages, he never has a date.”

“It was embarrassing. The whole thing was embarrassing. I’m glad I’ll never have to lay eyes on him again.”

“Oh, Ana, it can’t have been that bad. I think he sounds quite taken with you.”

Taken with me? Now Kate’s being ridiculous.

“Would you like a sandwich?”

“Please.”

We talk no more of Christian Grey that evening, much to my relief. Once we’ve eaten, I’m able to sit at the dining table with Kate and, while she works on her article, I work on my essay on *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*. Damn, but that woman was in the wrong place at the wrong time in the wrong century. By the time I finish, it’s midnight, and Kate has long since gone to bed. I make my way to my room, exhausted, but pleased that I’ve accomplished so much for a Monday.

I curl up in my white iron bed, wrapping my mother’s quilt around me, close my eyes, and I’m instantly asleep. That night I dream of dark places, bleak white cold floors, and gray eyes.

For the rest of the week, I throw myself into my studies and my job at Clayton’s. Kate is busy too,

compiling her last edition of her student magazine before she has to relinquish it to the new editor while also cramming for her finals. By Wednesday, she's much better, and I no longer have to endure the sight of her pink-flannel-with-too-many-rabbits PJs. I call my mom in Georgia to check on her, but also so she can wish me luck for my final exams. She proceeds to tell me about her latest venture into candle making – my mother is all about new business ventures. Fundamentally she's bored and wants something to occupy her time, but she has the attention span of a goldfish. It'll be something new next week.

She worries me. I hope she hasn't mortgaged the house to finance this latest scheme. And I hope that Bob – her relatively new but much older husband – is keeping an eye on her now that I'm no longer there. He does seem a lot more grounded than Husband Number Three.

"How are things with you, Ana?"

For a moment, I hesitate, and I have Mom's full attention.

"I'm fine."

"Ana? Have you met someone?" Wow... *how does she do that?* The excitement in her voice is palpable.

"No, Mom, it's nothing. You'll be the first to know if I do."

"Ana, you really need to get out more, honey. You worry me."

"Mom, I'm fine. How's Bob?" A never distraction is the best policy.

Later that evening, I call Ray, my stepdad, Mom's Husband Number Two, the man I consider my father, and the man whose name I bear. It's a brief conversation. In fact, it's not so much a conversation as a one-sided series of grunts in response to my gentle coaxing. Ray is not a talker. But he's still alive, he's still watching soccer on TV, and going bowling and fly-fishing or making furniture when he's not. Ray is a skilled carpenter and the reason I know the difference between a hawk and a handsaw. All seems well with him.

Friday night, Kate and I are debating what to do with our evening – we want some time out from our studies, from our work, and from student newspapers – when the doorbell rings.

Standing on our doorstep is my good friend José, clutching a bottle of champagne.

"José! Great to see you!" I give him a quick hug. "Come in."

José is the first person I met when I arrived at WSU, looking as lost and lonely as I did.

We recognized a kindred spirit in each of us that day, and we've been friends ever since.

Not only do we share a sense of humor, but we discovered that both Ray and José Senior were in the same army unit together. As a result, our fathers have become firm friends too.

José is studying engineering and is the first in his family to make it to college. He's pretty damn

deep in my belly. Desperately, I scrabble around for my equilibrium.

“Anything else?” My voice is husky and breathy. His eyes widen slightly.

“Some rope, I think.” His voice mirrors mine, husky.

“This way.” I duck my head down to hide my recurring blush and head for the aisle.

“What sort were you after? We have synthetic and natural filament rope... twine...

cable cord...” I halt at his expression, his eyes darkening. Holy cow.

“I’ll take five yards of the natural filament rope please.”

Quickly, with trembling fingers, I measure out five yards against the fixed ruler, aware that his hot gray gaze is on me. I dare not look at him. Jeez, could I feel any more self-conscious? Taking my Stanley knife from the back pocket of my jeans, I cut it then coil it neatly before tying it in a slipknot. By some miracle, I manage not to remove a finger with my knife.

“Were you a Girl Scout?” he asks, sculptured, sensual lips curled in amusement. *Don’t look at his mouth!*

“Organized, group activities aren’t really my thing, Mr. Grey.”

He arches a brow.

“What is your thing, Anastasia?” he asks, his voice soft and his secret smile is back. I gaze at him unable to express myself. I’m on shifting tectonic plates. *Try and be cool, Ana, my tortured subconscious begs on bended knee.*

“Books,” I whisper, but inside, my subconscious is screaming: *You! You are my thing!*

I slap it down instantly, mortified that my psyche is having ideas above its station.

“What kind of books?” He cocks his head to one side. *Why is he so interested?*

“Oh, you know. The usual. The classics. British literature, mainly.”

He rubs his chin with his long index finger and thumb as he contemplates my answer.

Or perhaps he’s just very bored and trying to hide it.

“Anything else you need?” I have to get off this subject – those fingers on that face are so beguiling.

“I don’t know. What else would you recommend?”

What would I recommend? I don’t even know what you’re doing.

“For a do-it-yourselfer?”

Chapter Three

Kate is ecstatic.

“But what was he doing at Clayton’s?” Her curiosity oozes through the phone. I’m in the depths of the stock room, trying to keep my voice casual.

“He was in the area.”

“I think that is one huge coincidence, Ana. You don’t think he was there to see you?”

she speculates. My heart lurches at the prospect, but it’s a short-lived joy. The dull, disappointing reality is that he was here on business.

“He was visiting the farming division of WSU. He’s funding some research,” I mutter.

“Oh yes. He’s given the department a \$2.5 million grant.”

Wow.

“How do you know this?”

“Ana, I’m a journalist, and I’ve written a profile on the guy. It’s my job to know this.”

“Okay, Carla Bernstein, keep your hair on. So do you want these photos?”

“Of course I do. The question is, who’s going to do them and where.”

“We could ask him where. He says he’s staying in the area.”

“You can contact him?”

“I have his cell phone number.”

Kate gasps.

“Except when you blush, of course, which is often. I just wish I knew what you were blushing about.” He pops a small piece of muffin into his mouth and starts to chew it slowly, not taking his eyes off me. And as if on cue, I blush. *Crap!*

“Do you always make such personal observations?”

“I hadn’t realized I was. Have I offended you?” He sounds surprised.

“No,” I answer truthfully.

“Good.”

“But you’re very high-handed,” I retaliate quietly.

He raises his eyebrows and, if I’m not mistaken, he flushes slightly too.

“I’m used to getting my own way, Anastasia,” he murmurs. “In all things.”

“I don’t doubt it. Why haven’t you asked me to call you by your first name?” I’m surprised by my audacity. Why has this conversation become so serious? This isn’t going the way I thought it was going to go. I can’t believe I’m feeling so antagonistic towards him.

It’s like he’s trying to warn me off.

“The only people who use my given name are my family and a few close friends.

That’s the way I like it.”

Oh. He still hasn’t said, ‘Call me Christian.’ He *is* a control freak, there’s no other explanation, and part of me is thinking maybe it would have been better if Kate had interviewed him. Two control freaks together. Plus of course she’s almost blonde – well, strawberry blonde – like all the women in his office. *And she’s beautiful*, my subconscious reminds me. I don’t like the idea of Christian and Kate. I take a sip of my tea, and Grey eats another small piece of his muffin.

“Are you an only child?” he asks.

Whoa... he keeps changing direction.

“Yes.”

“Tell me about your parents.”

Why does he want to know this? It’s so *dull*.

“My mom lives in Georgia with her new husband Bob. My stepdad lives in Montesano.”

“Your father?”

“My father died when I was a baby.”

I have misread the situation between us so utterly? I need to get away from him.

“For what?” he frowns. He hasn’t taken his hands off me.

“For saving me,” I whisper.

“That idiot was riding the wrong way. I’m glad I was here. I shudder to think what could have happened to you. Do you want to come and sit down in the hotel for a moment?” He releases me, his hands by his sides, and I’m standing in front of him feeling like a fool.

With a shake, I clear my head. I just want to go. All my vague, unarticulated hopes have been dashed. He doesn’t want me. *What was I thinking?* I scold myself. *What would Christian Grey want with you?* My subconscious mocks me. I wrap my arms around myself and turn to face the road and note with relief that the green man has appeared. I quickly make my way across, conscious that Grey is behind me. Outside the hotel, I turn briefly to face him but cannot look him in the eye.

“Thanks for the tea and doing the photo shoot,” I murmur.

“Anastasia... I...” He stops, and the anguish in his voice demands my attention, so I peer unwillingly up at him. His gray eyes are bleak as he runs his hand through his hair.

He looks torn, frustrated, his expression stark, all his careful control has evaporated.

“What, Christian?” I snap irritably after he says nothing. I just want to go. I need to take my fragile, wounded pride away and somehow nurse it back to health.

“Good luck with your exams,” he murmurs.

Huh? This is why he looks so desolate? This is the big send off? Just to wish me luck in my exams?

“Thanks.” I can’t disguise the sarcasm in my voice. “Goodbye, Mr. Grey.” I turn on my heel, vaguely amazed that I don’t trip, and without giving him a second glance, I disappear down the sidewalk toward the underground garage.

Once underneath the dark, cold concrete of the garage with its bleak fluorescent light, I lean against the wall and put my head in my hands. What was I thinking? Unbidden and unwelcome tears pool in my eyes. *Why am I crying?* I sink to the ground, angry at myself for this senseless reaction. Drawing up my knees, I fold in on myself. I want to make myself as small as possible. Perhaps this nonsensical pain will be smaller the smaller I am.

Placing my head on my knees, I let the irrational tears fall unrestrained. I am crying over the loss of something I never had. *How ridiculous.* Mourning something that never was –

my dashed hopes, dashed dreams, and my soured expectations.

I have never been on the receiving end of rejection. Okay... so I was always one of the last to be picked for basketball or volleyball – but I understood that – running and doing something else at the same time like bouncing or throwing a ball is not my thing. I am a serious liability in any sporting field.

“Not anymore. I won’t be seeing him again.” Yes, I manage to sound matter of fact.

“Oh?”

Crap. She’s intrigued. I head into the kitchen so that she can’t see my face.

“Yeah... he’s a little out of my league Kate,” I say as dryly as I can manage.

“What do you mean?”

“Oh Kate, it’s obvious.” I whirl round and face her as she stands in the kitchen doorway. “Not to me,” she says. “Okay, he’s got more money than you, but then he has more money than most people in America!”

“Kate he’s— ” I shrug.

“Ana! For heaven’s sake – how many times must I tell you? You’re a total babe,” she interrupts me. Oh no. She’s off on this tirade again.

“Kate, please. I need to study.” I cut her short. She frowns.

“Do you want to see the article? It’s finished. José took some great pictures.”



Do I need a visual reminder of the beautiful Christian I don’t-want-you Grey?

“Sure,” I manage a smile on to my face and stroll over to the laptop. And there he is, staring at me in black and white, staring at me and finding me lacking.

I pretend to read the article, all the time meeting his steady gray gaze, searching the photo for some clue as to why he’s not the man for me – his own words to me. And it’s suddenly, blindingly obvious. He’s too gloriously good-looking. We are poles apart and from two very different worlds. I have a vision of myself as Icarus flying too close to the sun and crashing and burning as a result. His words make sense. He’s not the man for me.

This is what he meant, and it makes his rejection easier to accept... almost. I can live with this. I understand.

“Very good Kate,” I manage. “I’m going to study.” I am not going to think about him again for now, I vow to myself, and opening my revision notes, I start to read.

It’s only when I’m in bed, trying to sleep, that I allow my thoughts to drift through my strange morning. I keep coming back to the ‘*I don’t do the girlfriend thing*’ quote, and I’m angry that I didn’t pounce on this information sooner, when I was in his arms mentally begging him with every fiber of my being to kiss me. He’d said it there and then. He didn’t want me as a girlfriend. I turn on to my side. Idly, I wonder if perhaps he’s celibate? I close my eyes and begin to drift. Maybe he’s saving himself. *Well not for you*, my sleepy subconscious has a final swipe at me before unleashing itself on

sprinkling of hair in the gap. In my groggy frame of mind, he looks yummy.

He takes my hand once more. *Holy cow* – he’s leading me onto the dance floor. Shit.

I do not dance. He can sense my reluctance, and under the colored lights, I can see his amused, slightly sardonic smile. He gives my hand a sharp tug, and I’m in his arms again, and he starts to move, taking me with him. Boy, he can dance, and I can’t believe that I’m following him step for step. Maybe it’s because I’m drunk that I can keep up. He’s holding me tight against him, his body against mine... if he wasn’t clutching me so tightly, I’m sure I would swoon at his feet. In the back of my mind, my mother’s often-recited warning comes to me: *Never trust a man who can dance.*

He moves us through the crowded throng of dancers to the other side of the dance floor, and we are beside Kate and Elliot, Christian’s brother. The music is pounding away, loud and leery, outside and inside my head. I gasp. *Kate is making her moves.* She’s dancing her ass off, and she only ever does that if she likes someone. Really likes someone. It means there’ll be three of us for breakfast tomorrow morning. *Kate!*

Christian leans over and shouts in Elliot’s ear. I cannot hear what he says. Elliot is tall with wide shoulders, curly blonde hair, and light, wickedly gleaming eyes. I can’t tell the color under the pulsating heat of the flashing lights. Elliot grins, and pulls Kate into his arms, where she is more than happy to be... *Kate!* Even in my inebriated state, I am shocked. She’s only just met him. She nods at whatever Elliot says and grins at me and waves. Christian propels us off the dance floor in double quick time.

But I never got to talk to her. Is she okay? I can see where things are heading for her and him. *I need to do the safe sex lecture.* In the back of my mind, I hope she reads one of the posters on the back of the toilet doors. My thoughts crash through my brain, fighting the drunk, fuzzy feeling. It’s so warm in here, so loud, so colorful – too bright. My head begins to swim, oh no... and I can feel the floor coming up to meet my face or so it feels.

The last thing I hear before I pass out in Christian Grey’s arms is his harsh epithet.

“Fuck!”

Chapter Five



want to know him any more then, quite frankly, it will be a relief. *Don't lie to yourself – my subconscious yells at me– it'll have to be pretty bloody bad to have you running for the hills.*

“Tonight.”

He raises an eyebrow.

“Like Eve, you’re so quick to eat from the tree of knowledge,” he smirks.

“Are you smirking at me, Mr. Grey?” I ask sweetly. *Pompous ass.*

He narrows his eyes at me and picks up his BlackBerry. He presses one number.

“Taylor. I’m going to need Charlie Tango.”

Charlie Tango! Who’s he?

“From Portland at say twenty-thirty... No, standby at Escala... All night.”

All night!

“Yes. On call tomorrow morning. I’ll pilot from Portland to Seattle.”

Pilot?

“Standby pilot from twenty-two-thirty” He puts the phone down. No please or thank you. “Do people always do what you tell them?”

“Usually, if they want to keep their jobs,” he says, deadpan.

“And if they don’t work for you?”

“Oh, I can be very persuasive, Anastasia. You should finish your breakfast. And then I’ll drop you home. I’ll pick you up at Clayton’s at eight when you finish. We’ll fly up to Seattle.”

I blink at him rapidly.

“Fly?”

“Yes. I have a helicopter.”

I gape at him. I have my second date with Christian oh-so-mysterious Grey. From coffee to helicopter rides. Wow.

“We’ll go by helicopter to Seattle?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Mr. Grey, it’s Welch here. I have the information you require.” A rasping, disembodied voice comes over the speakers.

“Good. Email it to me. Anything to add?”

“No sir.”

He presses the button, then the call ceases and the music is back. No goodbye or thanks. I’m so glad that I never seriously entertained the thought of working for him. I shudder at the very idea. He’s just too controlling and cold with his employees. The music cuts off again for the phone.

“Grey.”

“The NDA has been emailed to you, Mr. Grey.” A woman’s voice.

“Good. That’s all, Andrea.”

“Good day, sir.”

Christian hangs up by pressing a button on the steering wheel. The music is on very briefly when the phone rings again. Holy hell, is this his life, constant nagging phone calls?

“Grey,” he snaps.

“Hi, Christian, d’you get laid?”

“Hello, Elliot – I’m on speaker phone, and I’m not alone in the car,” Christian sighs.

“Who’s with you?”

Christian rolls his eyes.

“Anastasia Steele.”

“Hi, Ana!”

Ana!

“Hello, Elliot.”

“Heard a lot about you,” Elliot murmurs huskily. Christian frowns.

“Don’t believe a word Kate says.”

Elliot laughs.

“I’m dropping Anastasia off now.” Christian emphasizes my name. “Shall I pick you up?” “Sure.”

“See you shortly.” Christian hangs up, and the music is back.

The helicopter slows and hovers, and Christian sets it down on the helipad on top of the building. My heart is in my mouth. I can't decide if it's from nervous anticipation, relief that we've arrived alive, or fear that I will fail in some way. He switches the ignition off and the rotor blades slow and quiet until all I hear is the sound of my own erratic breathing.

Christian takes his headphones off, and reaches across and pulls mine off too.

"We're here," he says softly.

His look is so intense, half in shadow and half in the bright white light from the landing lights. Dark knight and white knight, it's a fitting metaphor for Christian. He looks strained. His jaw is clenched and his eyes are tight. He unfastens his seatbelt and reaches over to unbuckle mine. His face is inches from mine.

"You don't have to do anything you don't want to do. You know that don't you?" His tone is so earnest, desperate even, his gray eyes impassioned. He takes me by surprise.

"I'd never do anything I didn't want to do, Christian." And as I say the words, I don't quite feel their conviction because at this moment in time – I'd probably do anything for this man seated beside me. But this does the trick. He's mollified.

He eyes me warily for a moment and somehow, even though he's so tall, he manages to ease his way gracefully to the door of the helicopter and open it. He jumps out, waiting for me to follow, and takes my hand as I clamber down on to the helipad. It's very windy on top of the building, and I'm nervous about the fact that I'm standing at least fifty stories high in an enclosed space. Christian wraps his arm around my waist, pulling me tightly against him.

"Come," he shouts above the noise of the wind. He drags me over to an elevator shaft and, after tapping a number into a keypad, the doors open. It's warm inside and all mirrored glass. I can see Christian to infinity everywhere I look, and the wonderful thing is, he's holding me to infinity too. Christian taps another code into the keypad, then the doors close and the elevator descends.

Moments later, we're in an all-white foyer. In the middle is a round, dark wood table, and on it is an unbelievably huge bunch of white flowers. On the walls there are paintings, everywhere. He opens two double doors, and the white theme continues through the wide corridor and directly opposite where a palatial room opens up. It's the main living area, double height. Huge is too small a word for it. The far wall is glass and leads on to a balcony that overlooks Seattle.

To the right is an imposing 'U' shaped sofa that could sit ten adults comfortably. It faces a state-of-the-art stainless steel – or maybe platinum for all I know - modern fireplace.

The fire is lit and flaming gently. On the left beside us, by the entryway, is the kitchen area.

All white with dark wood worktops and a large breakfast bar which seats six.

Near the kitchen area, in front of the glass wall, is a dining table surrounded by sixteen chairs. And tucked in the corner is a full size, shiny black grand piano. Oh yes... he probably plays the piano too. There is art of all shapes and sizes on all the walls. In fact, this apartment looks more like a gallery

than a place to live.

“Can I take your jacket?” Christian asks. I shake my head. I’m still cold from the wind on the helipad.

“Would you like a drink?” he asks. I blink at him. After last night! *Is he trying to be funny?* For one second, I think about asking for a margarita – but I don’t have the nerve.

“I’m going to have a glass of white wine, would you like to join me?”

“Yes, please,” I murmur.

I am standing in this enormous room feeling out of place. I walk over to the glass wall, and I realize that the lower half of the wall opens concertina-style on to the balcony. Seattle is lit up and lively in the background. I walk back to the kitchen area – it takes a few seconds, it’s so far from the glass wall – and Christian is opening a bottle of wine. He’s removed his jacket.

“Pouilly Fumé okay with you?”

“I know nothing about wine, Christian. I’m sure it will be fine.” My voice is soft and hesitant. My heart is thumping. I want to run. This is seriously rich. Seriously over-the-top Bill Gates style wealthy. What am I doing here? *You know very well what you’re doing here* - my subconscious sneers at me. Yes, I want to be in Christian Grey’s bed.

“Here.” He hands me a glass of wine. Even the glasses are rich... heavy, contemporary, crystal. I take a sip, and the wine is light, crisp, and delicious.

“You’re very quiet, and you’re not even blushing. In fact – I think this is the palest I’ve ever seen you, Anastasia,” he murmurs. “Are you hungry?”

I shake my head. Not for food.

“It’s a very big place you have here.”

“Big?”

“Big.”

“It’s big,” he agrees, and his eyes glow with amusement. I take another sip of wine.

“Do you play?” I point my chin at the piano.

“Yes.”

“Well?”

“Yes.”

“Of course you do. Is there anything you can’t do well?”

“Open your mouth,” he commands and thrusts his thumb in my mouth. My eyes fly open, blinking wildly.

“See how you taste,” he breathes against my ear. “Suck me, baby.” His thumb presses on my tongue, and my mouth closes round him, sucking wildly. I taste the saltiness on his thumb and the faint metallic tang of blood. *Holy fuck*. This is wrong, but holy hell is it erotic.

“I want to fuck your mouth, Anastasia, and I will soon,” his voice is hoarse, raw, his breathing more disjointed.

Fuck my mouth! I moan, and I bite down on him. He gasps, and he pulls my hair tighter, painfully, so I release him.

“Naughty, sweet girl,” he whispers, and then reaches over to the bedside table for a foil packet. “Stay still, don’t move,” he orders as he releases my hair.

He rips the foil while I’m breathing hard, my blood singing in my veins. The anticipation is exhilarating. He leans down, his weight on me again, and he grabs my hair holding my head immobile. I cannot move. I’m enticingly ensnared by him, and he’s poised and ready to take me once more.

“We’re going to go real, slow this time, Anastasia,” he breathes.

And slowly he eases into me, slowly, slowly, until he’s buried in me. Stretching, filling, relentless. I groan loudly. It feels deeper this time, delectable. I groan again, and he deliberately circles his hips and pulls back, pauses a beat, and then ease his way back in.

He repeats this motion again and again. It’s driving me insane – his teasing, deliberately slow thrusts, and the intermittent feeling of fullness is overwhelming.

“You feel so good,” he groans, and my insides start to quiver. He pulls back and waits.

“Oh no, baby, not yet,” he murmurs, and as the quivering ceases, he starts the whole delicious process again.

“Oh, please,” I beg. I’m not sure I can take much more. My body is wound so tight, craving release.

“I want you sore, baby,” he murmurs, and he continues his sweet, leisurely torment, backward, forward.

“Every time you move tomorrow, I want you to be reminded that I’ve been here. Only me. You are mine.”

I groan.

“Please, Christian,” I whisper.

“What do you want, Anastasia? Tell me.”

I groan again. He pulls out and moves slowly back into me, circling his hips once more.

the piano toward me. He has broad shoulders, narrow hips, and his abdominal muscles ripple as he walks. He really is stunning.

“You should be in bed,” he admonishes.

“That was a beautiful piece. Bach?”

“Transcription by Bach, but it’s originally an oboe concerto by Alessandro Marcello.”

“It was exquisite, but very sad, such a melancholy melody.”

His lips quirk up in a half smile.

“Bed,” he orders. “You’ll be exhausted in the morning.”

“I woke and you weren’t there.”

“I find it difficult to sleep, and I’m not used to sleeping with anyone,” he murmurs. I can’t fathom his mood. He seems a little despondent, but it’s difficult to tell in the darkness. Perhaps it was the tone of the piece he was playing. He puts his arm around me and gently walks me back to the bedroom.

“How long have you been playing? You play beautifully.”

“Since I was six.”

“Oh.” Christian as a six-year-old boy. My mind conjures an image of a beautiful, copper-haired little boy with gray eyes and my heart melts – a mopet-haired kid who likes impossibly sad music.

“How are you feeling?” he asks when we are back in the room. He switches on a sidelight.

“I’m good.”

We both glance down at the bed at the same time. There’s blood on the sheets – evidence of my lost virginity. I flush, embarrassed, pulling the duvet tighter around me.

“Well, that’s going to give Mrs. Jones something to think about,” Christian mutters as he stands in front of me. He puts his hand under my chin and tips my head back, staring down at me. His eyes are intense as he examines my face. I realize that I’ve not seen his naked chest before. Instinctively, I reach out to run my fingers through the smattering of dark hair on his chest to see how it feels. Immediately, he steps back out of my reach.

“Get into bed,” he says sharply. “I’ll come and lie down with you.” His voice softens.

I drop my hand and frown. I don’t think I’ve ever touched his torso. He opens a chest of drawers and pulls out a t-shirt and quickly slips it on.

“Bed,” he orders again. I climb back onto the bed, trying not to think about the blood.

He clambers in beside me and pulls me into his embrace, wrapping his arms around me so that I’m

bath fills and smells of sweet sultry Jasmine. He stands and gazes at me, his eyes dark, then peels his t-shirt off and casts it on the floor.

“Miss Steele.” He holds his hand out.

I’m standing in the doorway, wide-eyed and wary, my arms wrapped around myself. I step forward while surreptitiously admiring his physique. He is just yummy. My subconscious swoons and passes out somewhere in the back of my head. I take his hand, and he bids me to step into the bath while I am still wearing his shirt. I do as I’m told. I’ll have to get used to it if I’m going to take him up on his outrageous offer... *if!* The water is enticingly hot.

“Turn around, face me,” he orders, his voice soft. I do as I’m bid. He’s watching me intently.

“I know that lip is delicious, I can attest to that, but will you stop biting it?” he says through clenched teeth. “You chewing it makes me want to fuck you, and you’re sore, okay?”

I gasp, automatically unlocking my lip, shocked.

“Yeah,” he challenges. “Got the picture.” He glares at me. I nod frantically. *I had no idea I could affect him so.*

“Good.” He reaches forward and takes my iPod out of the breast pocket and he puts it by the sink.

“Water and iPods – not a clever combination,” he mutters. He reaches down, grasps the hem of my white shirt, lifts it above my head, and discards it on the floor.

He stands back to gaze at me. *I’m naked for heaven’s sake.* I flush crimson and stare down at my hands, level with the base of my belly, and I desperately want to disappear into the hot water and foam, but I know he won’t want that.

“Hey,” he summons me. I peek up at him, and his head is cocked to one side. “Anastasia, you’re a very beautiful woman, the whole package. Don’t hang your head like you’re ashamed. You have nothing to be ashamed of, and it’s a real joy to stand here and gaze at you.” He takes my chin in his hand and tilts my head up to reach his eyes. They are soft and warm, heated even. *Oh my.* He’s so close. I could just reach up and touch him.

“You can sit down now.” He halts my scattered thoughts, and I scoot down into the warm, welcoming water. Ooh... it stings. Which takes me by surprise, but it smells heavenly too, and the initial smarting pain soon ebbs away. I lie back and briefly close my eyes, relaxing in the soothing warmth. When I open them, he is gazing down at me.

“Why don’t you join me?” I ask, bravely I think – my voice husky.

“I think I will. Move forward,” he orders.

He strips out of his PJ pants and climbs in behind me. The water rises as he sits and pulls me against his chest. He places his long legs over mine, his knees bent and his ankles level with mine, and he pulls his feet apart, opening my legs. I gasp in surprise. His nose is in my hair and he inhales deeply.

“Turn around. I need washing, too,” he murmurs.

Oh! Turning to face him, I’m shocked to find he has his erection firmly in his grasp.

My mouth drops open.

“I want you to become well acquainted, on first name terms if you will, with my favorite and most cherished part of my body. I’m very attached to this.”

It’s so big and growing. His erection is above the water line, the water lapping at his hips. I glance up at him and come face to face with his wicked grin. He’s enjoying my astounded expression. I realize that I’m staring. I swallow. *That was inside me!* It doesn’t seem possible. He wants me to touch him. *Hmm...* okay, bring it on.

I smile at him and reach for the body wash, squirting some soap onto my hand. I do as he’s done, lathering the soap in my hands until they are foamy. I do not take my eyes off his. My lips are parted to accommodate my breathing... very deliberately I gently bite my bottom lip and then run my tongue across it, tracing where my teeth have been. His eyes are serious and dark, and they widen as my tongue skims my lower lip. I reach forward and place one of my hands around him, mirroring how he’s holding himself. His eyes close briefly. Wow... feels much firmer than I expect. I squeeze, and he places his hand over mine. “Like this,” he whispers, and he moves his hand up and down with a firm grip round my fingers, and my fingers tighten around him. He closes his eyes again, and his breath hitches in his throat. When he opens them again, his gaze is scorching molten gray. “That’s right, baby.”

He releases my hand, leaving me to continue alone, and closes his eyes as I move up and down his length. He flexes his hip slightly into my hand and reflexively I grasp him tighter. A low groan escapes from deep within his throat. *Fuck my mouth...* *hmm.* I remember him pushing his thumb in my mouth and asking me to suck, hard. His mouth drops open slightly as his breathing increases. I lean forward, while he has his eyes closed, and place my lips around him and tentatively suck, running my tongue over the tip.

“Whoa... Ana.” His eyes fly open, and I suck harder.

Hmm... he’s soft and hard at once, like steel encased in velvet, and surprisingly tasty – salty and smooth.

“Christ,” he groans, and he closes his eyes again.

Moving down, I push him into my mouth. He groans again. *Ha!* My inner goddess is thrilled. I can do this. *I can fuck him* with my mouth. I twirl my tongue around the tip again, and he flexes his hips. His eyes are open now, blistering with heat. His teeth are clenched as he flexes again, and I push him deeper into my mouth, supporting myself on his thighs. I feel his legs tense beneath my hands. He reaches up and grabs my pigtails and starts to really move.

“Oh... baby... that feels good,” he murmurs. I suck harder, flicking my tongue across the head of his impressive erection. Wrapping my teeth behind my lips, I clamp my mouth around him. His breath

“Say yes,” he whispers fervently.

I frown, not understanding.

“To what?”

“Yes to our arrangement. To being mine. Please, Ana,” he whispers, emphasizing the last word and my name, pleading. He kisses me again, sweetly, passionately, before he stands back and stares at me, blinking slightly. He takes my hand and leads me back to his bedroom, leaving me reeling, so I follow him meekly. Stunned. *He really wants this.*

In his bedroom, he stares down at me as we stand by his bed.

“Trust me?” he asks suddenly. I nod, wide-eyed with the sudden realization that I do trust him. *What’s he going to do to me now?* An electric thrill hums through me.

“Good girl,” he breathes, his thumb brushing my bottom lip. He steps away into his closet and comes back with a silver-grey silk woven tie.

“Knit your hands together in front of you,” he orders as he peels the towel off me and throws it on the floor.

I do as he asks, and he binds my wrists together with his tie, knotting it firmly. His eyes are bright with wild excitement. He tugs at the binding. It’s tight. *Some boy scout he must have been to learn these knots.* What now? My pulse has gone through the roof, my heart beating a frantic tattoo. He runs his fingers down my pigtails.

“You look so young with these,” he murmurs and moves forward. Instinctively, I move back until I feel the bed against the back of my knees. He drops his towel, but I can’t take my eyes off his face. His expression is ardent, full of desire.

“Oh, Anastasia, what shall I do to you?” he whispers as he lowers me on to the bed, lying beside me, and raising my hands above my head.

“Keep your hands up here, don’t move them, understand?” His eyes burn into mine, and I’m breathless from their intensity. This is not a man I want to cross... ever.

“Answer me,” he demands, his voice soft.

“I won’t move my hands.” I’m breathless.

“Good girl,” he murmurs and deliberately licks his lips slowly. I’m mesmerized by his tongue as it sweeps slowly over his upper lip. He’s staring into my eyes, watching me, appraising. He leans down and plants a chaste, swift kiss on my lips.

“I’m going to kiss you all over, Miss Steele,” he says softly, and he cups my chin, pushing it up giving him access to my throat. His lips glide down my throat, kissing, sucking, and nipping, to the small dip at the base of my neck. My body leaps to attention... everywhere. My recent bath experience has made my skin hyper-sensitive. My heated blood pools low in my belly, between my legs, right down *there*. I

Holy shit. Christian's mother. This is so much more than I bargained for. Perhaps meeting her will help put a little part of the jigsaw in place. Might help me understand why Christian is the way he is... Suddenly, I want to meet her. I pull my shirt off the floor, and I'm pleased to discover that it has survived the night well with hardly any creases. I find my blue bra under the bed and dress quickly. But if there's one thing I hate, it's not wearing clean panties. I rifle through Christian's chest of drawers and come across his boxer briefs.

After pulling on a pair of tight gray Calvin Kleins, I tug on my jeans and my Converse.

Grabbing my jacket, I dash into the bathroom and stare at my too-bright eyes, my flushed face – and my hair! Holy crap... just-fucked pigtails do not suit me either. I hunt in the vanity unit for a brush and find a comb. It will have to do. A ponytail is the only answer. I despair at my clothes. Maybe I should take Christian up on his offer of clothes.

My subconscious purses her lips and mouths the word 'ho'. I ignore her. Struggling into my jacket, pleased that the cuffs cover the tell-tale patterns from his tie, I take a last anxious glance at myself in the mirror. This will have to do. I make my way into the main living room.

"Here she is." Christian stands from where he's lounging on the couch.

His expression is warm and appreciative. The sandy-haired woman beside him turns and beams at me, a full megawatt smile. She stands too. She's impeccably attired in a camel-colored fine knit sweater dress with matching shoes. She looks groomed, elegant, beautiful, and inside I die a little, knowing I look such a mess.

"Mother, this is Anastasia Steele. Anastasia, this is Grace Trevelyan-Grey."

Dr. Trevelyan-Grey holds her hand out to me. *T... for Trevelyan?*

"What a pleasure to meet you," she murmurs. If I'm not mistaken, there is wonder and maybe stunned relief in her voice and a warm glow in her hazel eyes. I grasp her hand, and I can't help but smile, returning her warmth.

"Dr. Trevelyan-Grey," I murmur.

"Call me Grace," she grins, and Christian frowns. "I am usually Dr. Trevelyan, and Mrs. Grey is my mother-in-law." She winks. "So how did you two meet?" She looks questioningly at Christian, unable to hide her curiosity.

"Anastasia interviewed me for the student paper at WSU because I'm conferring the degrees there this week."

Double crap. I'd forgotten that.

"So you are graduating this week?" Grace asks.

"Yes."

My cell phone starts ringing. *Kate, I bet.*

“Excuse me.” It’s in the kitchen. I wander over and lean across the breakfast bar, not checking the number.

“Kate.”

“Dios mio! Ana!” *Holy crap, it’s José.* He sounds desperate. “Where are you? I’ve been trying to contact you. I need to see you, to apologize for my behavior on Friday. Why haven’t you returned my calls?”

“Look José, now’s not a good time.” I glance anxiously over at Christian who’s watching me intently, his face impassive as he murmurs something to his mom. I turn my back to him.

“Where are you? Kate is being so evasive,” he whines.

“I’m in Seattle.”

“What are you doing in Seattle? Are you with him?”

“José, I’ll call you later. I can’t talk to you now.” I hang up.

I walk as nonchalantly back to Christian and his mother. Grace is in full flow.

“... And Elliot called to say you were around – I haven’t seen you for two weeks, darling.”

“Did he now?” Christian murmurs, gazing at me, his expression unreadable.

“I thought we might have lunch together, but I can see you have other plans, and I don’t want to interrupt your day.” She gathers up her long cream coat and turns to him, offering him her cheek. He kisses her briefly, sweetly. She doesn’t touch him.

“I have to drive Anastasia back to Portland.”

“Of course, darling. Anastasia, it’s been such a pleasure. I do hope we meet again.”

She holds her hand out to me, her eyes glowing, and we shake.

Taylor appears from... *where?*

“Mrs. Grey?” he asks.

“Thank you, Taylor.” He escorts her from the room and through the double doors to the foyer. Taylor was here the whole time? How long has he been here? Where has he been?

Christian glares at me.

“So the photographer called?”

Crap.

“Yes.”

THE PARTIES AGREE AS FOLLOWS

1 The following are the terms of a binding contract between the Dominant and the Submissive.

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FUNDAMENTAL TERMS

2 The fundamental purpose of this contract is to allow the Submissive to explore her sensuality and her limits safely, with due respect and regard for her needs, her limits and her wellbeing.

3 The Dominant and the Submissive agree and acknowledge that all that occurs under the terms of this contract will be consensual, confidential, and subject to the agreed limits and safety procedures set out in this contract. Additional limits and safety procedures may be agreed in writing.

4 The Dominant and the Submissive each warrant that they suffer from no sexual, serious, infectious or life-threatening illnesses including but not limited to HIV, Her-pes and Hepatitis. If during the Term (as defined below) or any extended term of this contract either party should be diagnosed with or become aware of any such illness he or she undertakes to inform the other immediately and in any event prior to any form of physical contact between the parties.

5 Adherence to the above warranties, agreements and undertakings (and any additional limits and safety procedures agreed under clause 3 above) are fundamental to this contract. Any breach shall render it void with immediate effect and each party agrees to be fully responsible to the other for the consequence of any breach.

6 Everything in this contract must be read and interpreted in the light of the fundamental purpose and the fundamental terms set out in clauses 2-5 above.

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COMMENCEMENT AND TERM

10 The Dominant and Submissive enter into this contract on The Commencement Date fully aware of its nature and undertake to abide by its conditions without exception.

11 This contract shall be effective for a period of three Calendar Months from The Commencement Date ("The Term"). On the expiry of The Term the parties shall discuss whether this contract and the arrangements they have made under this contract are satisfactory and whether the needs of each party have been met. Either party may propose the extension of this contract subject to adjustments to its terms, or to the arrangements they have made under it. In the absence of agreement to such extension this contract shall terminate and both parties shall be free to resume their lives separately.

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LOCATION

14 The Submissive will make herself available during the Allotted Times and agreed additional times at locations to be determined by the Dominant. The Dominant will ensure that all travel costs incurred by the Submissive for that purpose are met by the Dominant.

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15.11 The Dominant may restrain, handcuff, or bind the Submissive at any time during the Allotted Times or any agreed additional times for any reason and for extended periods of time, giving due regard to the health and safety of the Submissive.

15.12 The Dominant will ensure that all equipment used for the purposes of training and discipline shall be maintained in a clean, hygienic and safe state at all times.

SUBMISSIVE

15.13 The Submissive accepts the Dominant as her master, with the understanding that she is now the property of the Dominant, to be dealt with as the Dominant pleases during the Term generally but specifically during the Allotted Times and any additional agreed allotted times.

15.14 The Submissive shall obey the rules ("the Rules") set out in Appendix 1 to this agreement.

15.15 The Submissive shall serve the Dominant in any way the Dominant sees fit and shall endeavor to please the Dominant at all times to the best of her ability.

15.16 The Submissive shall take all measures necessary to maintain her good health and shall request or seek medical attention whenever it is needed, keeping the Dominant informed at all times of any health issues that may arise.

15.17 The Submissive will ensure that she procures oral contraception and ensure that she takes it as and when prescribed to prevent any pregnancy.

15.18 The Submissive shall accept without question any and all disciplinary actions deemed necessary by the Dominant and remember her status and role in regard to the Dominant at all times.

15.19 The Submissive shall not touch or pleasure herself sexually without permission from the Dominant.

15.20 The Submissive shall submit to any sexual activity demanded by the Dominant and shall do without hesitation or argument.

15.21 The Submissive shall accept whippings, floggings, spankings, caning, paddling or any other discipline the Dominant should decide to administer, without hesitation, enquiry or complaint.

15.22 The Submissive shall not look directly into the eyes of the Dominant except when specifically instructed to do so. The Submissive shall keep her eyes cast down and maintain a quiet and respectful bearing in the presence of the Dominant.

15.23 The Submissive shall always conduct herself in a respectful manner to the Dominant and shall address him only as Sir, Mr. Grey, or such other title as the Dominant may direct.

15.24 The Submissive will not touch the Dominant without his express permission to do so.

APPENDIX 3

Soft Limits

To be discussed and agreed between both parties:

Which of the following sexual acts are acceptable to the Submissive?

- Masturbation
- Fellatio
- Cunnilingus
- Vaginal intercourse
- Vaginal fisting
- Anal intercourse
- Anal fisting

Is swallowing semen acceptable to the Submissive?

Is the use of sex toys acceptable to the Submissive?

- Vibrators
- Dildos
- Butt Plugs
- Other

Is Bondage acceptable to the Submissive?

- Hands in front
- Hands behind back
- Ankles
- Knees
- Elbows
- Wrists to ankles
- Spreader bars

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My head is buzzing. How can I possibly agree to all this? And apparently it's for my benefit, *to explore my sensuality, my limits – safely – oh please!* I scoff angrily. *Serve and obey in all things.* All Things! I shake my head in disbelief. Actually, doesn't the marriage ceremony use those words... *obey*? This throws me. Do couples still say that? Only three months, is that why there have been so many? He doesn't keep them for long? Or have they had enough after three months? *Every weekend?* That's too much. I'll never see Kate or whatever friends I may make at my new job – provided I get one. Perhaps I should have one weekend a month to myself. Perhaps when I have my period, that sounds... practical.

He's my master! To be dealt with as he pleases! *Holy shit.*

I shudder at the thought of being flogged or whipped. Spanking probably wouldn't be so bad, humiliating though. And tied up? Well he did tie my hands together. That was...

well it was hot, really hot, so perhaps that won't be so bad. He won't loan me to another Dominant – damn right he won't. That would be totally unacceptable. *Why am I even thinking about this?*

I can't look him in the eye. *How weird is that?* The only way I ever have any chance to see what he's thinking. Actually, whom am I kidding, I never know what he's thinking, but I like looking into his eyes. He has beautiful eyes – captivating, intelligent, deep and dark, dark with dominant secrets. I recall his burning smoky gaze and press my thighs together, squirming.

And I can't touch him. Well, no surprise there. And the *essing* rules... No, no I can't do this. I put my head in my hands. This is no way to have a relationship. I need some sleep. I'm shattered. All the physical shenanigans I've been engaged in over the last twenty-four hours have been, frankly, exhausting. And mentally... damn, this is so much to take on board. As José would say, a real mind-fuck. Perhaps in the morning, this might be read like a bad joke.

I scramble up and change quickly. Perhaps I should borrow Kate's pink flannel pajamas. I want something cuddly and reassuring around me. I head to the bathroom in my t-shirt and sleep shorts and brush my teeth.

I stare at myself in the bathroom mirror. *You can't seriously be considering this...*

My subconscious sounds sane and rational, not her usual snarky self. My inner goddess is jumping up and down, clapping her hands like a five-year-old. *Please, let's do this...*

otherwise we'll end up alone with lots of cats and your classic novels to keep you company.

The only man I've ever been attracted to, and he comes with a bloody contract, a flogger, and a whole world of issues. Well, at least I got my way this weekend. My inner goddess stops jumping and smiles serenely. *Oh yes...* she mouths, nodding at me smugly.

I flush at the memory of his hands and his mouth on me, his body inside mine. Closing my eyes, I feel the familiar delicious pull of my muscles from deep, deep down. I want to do that again and again. Maybe if I just sign up for the sex... would he go with that? I suspect not.

Am I submissive? Maybe I come across that way. Maybe I misled him in the interview. I'm shy,

To: Anastasia Steele

Miss Steele

Stop emailing *me* – and do your assignment.

I'd like to award another A.

The first one was so well deserved. ;)

Christian Grey

CEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings Inc.

Christian Grey just sent me a winking smiley... *On my*. I fire up Google.

From: Anastasia Steele

Subject: Internet Research

Date: May 23 2011 17:59

To: Christian Grey

Mr. Grey

What would you suggest I put into a search engine?

Ana

From: Christian Grey

Subject: Internet Research

Date: May 23 2011 18:02

To: Anastasia Steele

“I wondered what your bedroom would look like,” he says.

I glance around it, plotting an escape route, no – there’s still only the door or window.

My room is functional but cozy – sparse white wicker furniture and a white iron double bed with a patchwork quilt, made by my mother when she was in her folksy American quilting phase. It’s all pale blue and cream.

“It’s very serene and peaceful in here,” he murmurs. *Not at the moment... not with you here.* Finally, my medulla oblongata recalls its purpose, I breathe.

“How... ?”

He smiles at me.

“I’m still at the Heathman.”

I know that.

“Would you like a drink?” Politeness wins out over everything else I’d like to say.

“No, thank you, Anastasia.” He smiles a dazzling, crooked smile, his head cocked slightly to one side.

Well, I might need one.

“So, it was *nice* knowing me?”

Holy cow, is he *offended*. I stare down at my fingers. How am I going to dig myself out of this? If I tell him it was a joke, I don’t think he’ll be impressed.

“I thought you’d reply by email.” My voice is small, pathetic.

“Are you biting your lower lip deliberately?” he asks darkly.

I blink up at him, gasping, freeing my lip.

“I wasn’t aware I was biting my lip,” I murmur softly.

My heart is pounding. I can feel that pull, that delicious electricity between us charging, filling the space between us with static. He’s sitting so close to me, his eyes dark smoky gray, his elbows resting on his knees, his legs apart. Leaning forward, he slowly undoes one of my pigtails, his fingers freeing my hair. My breathing is shallow, and I cannot move. I watch hypnotized as his hand moves to my second pigtail, and pulling the hair tie, he loosens the braid with his long, skilled fingers.

“So you decided on some exercise,” he breathes, his voice soft and melodious. His fingers gently tuck my hair behind my ear. “Why, Anastasia?” His fingers circle my ear, and very softly, he tugs my earlobe, rhythmically. It’s so sexual.

“I needed time to think,” I whisper. I’m all rabbit/headlights, moth/flame, bird/snake...

“Well that’s another first.” He eyes me speculatively. “So nothing you want to discuss now? About the contract.”

“No.” I reply petulantly.

“God, I’d like to give you a good hiding. You’d feel a lot better, and so would I.”

“You can’t say things like that... I haven’t signed anything yet.”

“A man can dream, Anastasia.” He leans over me and grasps my chin. “Wednesday?”

he murmurs, and he kisses me lightly on my lips.

“Wednesday,” I agree. “I’ll see you out. If you give me a minute.” I sit up and grab my t-shirt, pushing him out of the way. Amused and reluctant, he gets up off the bed.

“Please pass me my sweat pants.”

He collects them from the floor and hands them to me.

“Yes, ma’am.” He’s trying unsuccessfully to hide his smile.

I narrow my eyes at him as I slip the pants on. My hair is a tangle, and I know I’ll have to face the Katherine Kavanagh Inquisition after he’s gone. Grabbing a hair tie, I walk to my bedroom door, opening it slightly checking for Kate. She is not in the living area. I think I can hear her on the phone in her room. Christian follows me out. During the short walk from bedroom to front door, my thoughts and feelings ebb and flow, transforming. I’m no longer angry with him, I feel suddenly unbearably shy. I don’t want him to go. For the first time, I’m wishing he was – *normal* – wanting a normal relationship that doesn’t need a ten-page agreement, a flogger, and karabiners in his playroom ceiling.

I open the door for him and stare down at my hands. This is the first time I have ever had sex in my home, and as sex goes, I think it was pretty damn fine. But now I feel like a receptacle – an empty vessel to be filled at his whim. My subconscious shakes her head.

You wanted to run to the Heathman for sex – you had it express-delivered. She crosses her arms and taps her foot with a what-are-you-complaining-about-look on her face. Christian stops in the doorway and clasps my chin, forcing my eyes to meet his. His brow creases slightly.

“You okay?” he asks tenderly as his thumb lightly caresses my bottom lip.

“Yes.” I reply, though in all honesty I’m just not sure. I feel a paradigm shift. I know that if I do this thing with him, I will get hurt. He’s not capable, interested, or willing to offer me any more... and I want more. *Much more.* The surge of jealousy I felt only moments ago tells me that I have deeper feelings for him than I have admitted to myself.

“Wednesday,” he confirms, and he leans forward and kisses me softly. Something changes while he’s kissing me, his lips grow more urgent against mine, his hand moves up from my chin and he’s holding the side of my head, his other hand on the other side. His breathing accelerates. He deepens the kiss, leaning into me. I put my hands on his arms.

Dear Mr. Grey

Here is my list of issues. I look forward to discussing them more fully at dinner on Wednesday.

The numbers refer to clauses:

2: Not sure why this is solely for MY benefit – ie to explore MY sensuality and limits. I'm sure I wouldn't need a ten-page contract to do that! Surely this is for YOUR benefit.

4: As you are aware you are my only sexual partner. I don't take drugs, and I've not had any blood transfusions. I'm probably safe. What about you?

8: I can terminate at any time if I don't think you're sticking to the agreed limits. Okay – I like this.

9: Obey you in all things? Accept without hesitation your discipline? We need to talk about this.

11: One month trial period. Not three.

12: I cannot commit every weekend. I do have a life, or will have. Perhaps three out of four?

15.2: Using my body as you see fit sexually or otherwise – please define “or otherwise.”

15.5: This whole discipline clause. I'm not sure I want to be whipped, flogged, or corporally punished. I am sure this would be in breach of clauses 2-5. And also “for any other reason”. That's just mean – and you told me you weren't a saint.

15.10: Like loaning me out to someone else would ever be an option. But I'm glad it's here in black and white.

15.14: The Rules. More on those later.

15.19: Touching myself without your permission. What's the problem with this? You know I don't do it anyway.

15.21: Discipline – Please see clause 15.5 above.

15.22: I can't look into your eyes? Why?

15.24: Why can't I touch you?

Rules:

Sleep – I'll agree to 6 hours. Food – I am not eating food from a prescribed list. The food list goes on. I do – Deal breaker. Clothes – as long as I only have to wear your clothes when I'm with you... okay. Exercise – We agreed 3 hours, this still says 4.

“Just keeping it real, Ana. The whole package – looks good. Keep the dress. You’ll have him eating out of your hand.”

My mouth presses in a hard line. *Oh, you so have that the wrong way round.*

“Wish me luck.”

“You need luck for a date?” Her brow furrows, puzzled.

“Yes, Kate.”

“Well then – good luck.” She hugs me, and I am out the front door.

I have to drive in my bare feet – Wanda, my sea-blue Beetle, wasn’t built to be driven by stiletto-wearers. I pull up outside the Heathman at six-fifty-eight precisely and hand my car keys to the valet for parking. He looks askance at my Beetle, but I ignore him. Taking a deep breath and mentally girding my loins, I head into the hotel.

Christian is leaning casually against the bar, drinking a glass of white wine. He’s dressed in his customary white linen shirt, black jeans, black tie, and black jacket. His hair is as tousled as ever. I sigh. Of course he looks gorgeous. I stand for a few seconds in the entrance of the bar, gazing at him, admiring the view. He is beyond beautiful. He glances, nervously, I think, toward the entrance and stills when he sees me. Blinking a couple of times, he then smiles a slow, lazy, sexy smile that renders me speechless and all molten inside. Making a supreme effort not to bite my lip, I move forward aware that I, Anastasia Steele of Clonsville, am in high stilettos. He walks gracefully over to meet me.

“You look stunning,” he murmurs as he leans down to briefly kiss my cheek. “A dress, Miss Steele. I approve.” Taking my arm, he leads me to a secluded booth and signals for the waiter.

“What would you like to drink?”

My lips quirk up in a quick, sly smile as I sit and slide into the booth – well, at least he’s asking me.

“I’ll have what you’re having, please.” See! I can play nice and behave myself.

Amused, he orders another glass of Sancerre and slides in opposite me.

“They have an excellent wine cellar here,” he says, cocking his head to one side.

Putting his elbows on the table, he steeples his fingers in front of his beautiful mouth, his gray eyes alive with some unreadable emotion. And there it is... that familiar pull and charge from him, it connects somewhere deep inside me. I shift uncomfortably under his scrutiny, my heart palpitating. I must keep my cool.

“Are you nervous?” he asks softly.

“Yes.”

“I know.”

“And right now, I want to peel you out of that dress.”

I swallow. *Peel me out of Kate’s dress.* I feel the pull deep in my belly. Muscles that I’m now more acquainted with clench at his words. But I can’t have this. His most potent weapon, used against me again. He’s so good at sex – even I’ve figured this out.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” I murmur quietly. “We haven’t had dessert.”

“You want dessert?” he snorts.

“Yes.”

“You could be dessert,” he murmurs suggestively.

“I’m not sure I’m sweet enough.”

“Anastasia, you’re deliciously sweet. I know.”

“Christian. You use sex as a weapon. It really isn’t fair,” I whisper, staring down at my hands, and then looking directly at him. He raises his eyebrows, surprised, and I see he’s considering my words. He strokes his chin thoughtfully.

“You’re right. I do. In life you use what you know, Anastasia. Doesn’t change how much I want you. Here. Now.”

How can he seduce me solely with his voice? I’m panting already – my heated blood rushing through my veins, my nerves tingling.

“I’d like to try something,” he breathes.

I frown. He’s just given me a shit load of ideas to process and now this.

“If you were my sub, you wouldn’t have to think about this. It would be easy.” His voice is soft, seductive. “All those decisions – all the wearying thought processes behind them. The – is this the right thing to do? Should this happen here? Can it happen now?”

You wouldn’t have to worry about any of that detail. That’s what I’d do as your Dom. And right now, I know you want me, Anastasia.”

My frown deepens. How can he tell?

“I can tell because...”

Holy shit he’s answering my unspoken question. Is he psychic as well?

“... Your body gives you away. You’re pressing your thighs together, you’re flushed, and your breathing has changed.”

The waiter chooses this moment to knock and, unbidden, enter. He glances briefly at Christian, who frowns at him but then nods, so the waiter clears our plates. The waiter's arrival has broken the spell. And I grasp this precious moment of clarity. I have to go. Our meeting will only end one way if I stay, and I need some boundaries after such an intense conversation. As much as my body craves his touch, my mind is rebelling. I need some distance to think about all he's said. I still haven't made a decision, and his sexual allure and prowess doesn't make it any easier.

"Would you like some dessert?" Christian asks, ever the gentleman, but his eyes still blaze.

"No, thank you. I think I should go." I stare down at my hands.

"Go?" He can't hide his surprise.

The waiter leaves hastily.

"Yes." It's the right decision. If I stay here, in this room with him, he will fuck me. I stand, purposefully. "We both have the graduation ceremony tomorrow."

Christian stands automatically, revealing years of ingrained civility.

"I don't want you to go."

"Please... I have to."

"Why?"

"Because you've given me so much to consider... and I need some distance."

"I could make you stay," he threatens.

"Yes, you could easily, but I don't want you to."

He runs his hand through his hair, regarding me carefully.

"You know, when you fell into my office to interview me, you were all yes sir, no sir.

I thought you were a natural born submissive. But quite frankly, Anastasia, I'm not sure you have a submissive bone in your delectable body." He moves slowly toward me as he speaks, his voice tense.

"You may be right," I breathe.

"I want the chance to explore the possibility that you do," he murmurs, staring down at me. He reaches up and caresses my face, his thumb tracing my lower lip. "I don't know any other way, Anastasia. This is who I am."

"I know."

He leans down to kiss me, but pauses before his lips touch mine, his eyes searching mine, wanting, asking permission. I raise my lips to his, and he kisses me and because I don't know if I'll ever kiss

“You’re moving this weekend to Seattle. If you make the right decision, can I see you on Sunday?” He sounds hesitant.

“We’ll see. Maybe,” I breathe. Momentarily, he looks relieved, and then he frowns.

“It’s cooler now, don’t you have a jacket?”

“No.”

He shakes his head in irritation and takes off his jacket.

“Here. I don’t want you catching cold.”

I blink up at him as he holds it open, and as I hold my arms out behind me, I’m reminded of the time in his office when he slipped my coat onto my shoulders – the first time I met him – and the effect he had on me then. Nothing’s changed, in fact, it’s more intense.

His jacket is warm, far too big, and it smells of him. *Oh my...* delicious.

My car pulls up outside. Christian’s mouth drops open.

“That’s what you drive?” He’s appalled. Taking my hand, he leads me outside. The valet jumps out and hands me my keys, and Christian coolly palms him some money.

“Is this roadworthy?” He’s glaring at me now.

“Yes.”

“Will it make it to Seattle?”

“Yes. She will.”

“Safely?”

“Yes,” I snap, exasperated. “Okay she’s old. But she’s mine, and she’s roadworthy.

My stepdad bought it for me.”

“Oh, Anastasia, I think we can do better than this.”

“What do you mean?” Realization dawns. “You are *not* buying me a car.”

He glowers at me, his jaw tense.

“We’ll see,” he says tightly.

He grimaces as he opens the driver’s door and helps me in. I take my shoes off and roll down the

Christian Grey

CEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings Inc.

His email makes me weep more. I am not a merger. I am not an acquisition. Reading this, I might as well be. I don't reply. I just don't know what to say to him. I fumble into my PJs, and wrapping his jacket around me. I climb into bed. As I lie staring into the darkness, I think of all the times he warned me to stay away.

'Anastasia, you should steer clear of me. I'm not the man for you.'

'I don't do the girlfriend thing.'

'I'm not a hearts and flowers kind of guy.'

'I don't make love.' *'This is all I know.'*

And as I weep into my pillow silently, it's this last idea I cling to. This is all I know, too.

Perhaps together we can chart a new course.

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Chapter Fourteen



Christian is standing over me grasping a plaited, leather riding-crop. He's wearing old, faded, ripped Levis and that's all. He flicks the crop slowly into his palm as he gazes down at me. He's smiling, triumphant. I cannot move. I am naked and shackled, spread-eagled on a large four-poster bed. Reaching forward, he trails the tip of the crop from my forehead down the length of my nose, so I can smell the leather, and over my parted, panting lips.

He pushes the tip into my mouth so I can taste the smooth, rich leather.

"Suck," he commands his voice soft. My mouth closes over the tip as I obey.

"Enough," he snaps.

I'm panting once more as he tugs the crop out of my mouth, trails it down and under my chin, on down my neck to the hollow at the base of my throat. He swirls it slowly there and then continues to drag the tip down my body, along my sternum, between my breasts, over my torso down to my navel. I'm panting, squirming, pulling against my restraints that are biting into my wrists and my ankles. He swirls the tip around my navel then continues to trail the leather tip south, through my pubic hair to my clitoris. He flicks the crop and it hits my sweet spot with a sharp slap, and I come, gloriously, shouting my release.

Abruptly, I wake, gasping for breath, covered in sweat and feeling the aftershocks of my orgasm. Holy hell. I'm completely disorientated. *What the hell just happened?* I'm in my bedroom alone. How? Why? I sit bolt upright, shocked... wow. It's morning. I glance at my alarm clock – eight o'clock. I put my head in my hands. I didn't know I could dream sex. Was it something I ate? Perhaps the oysters and my Internet research manifesting itself in my first wet dream. It's bewildering. I had no idea that I could orgasm in my sleep.

Kate is skipping around the kitchen when I stagger in.

"Ana, are you okay? You look odd. Is that Christian's jacket you're wearing?"

"I'm fine." Damn, should have checked in the mirror. I avoid her piercing green eyes.

I'm still reeling from my morning's event. "Yes, this is Christian's jacket."

She frowns.

"Did you sleep?"

"Not very well."

I head for the kettle. I need tea.

"How was dinner?"

So it begins.

"We had oysters. Followed by cod, so I'd say it was fishy."

"Ugh... I hate oysters, and I don't want to know about the food. How was Christian?"

What did you talk about?"

"He was attentive," I pause.

What can I say? His HIV status is clear, he's heavily into role-play, wants me to obey his every command, he hurt someone he tied to his bedroom ceiling, and he wanted to fuck me in the private dining room. Would that be a good summary? I try desperately to remember something from my encounter with Christian that I can discuss with Kate.

"He doesn't approve of Wanda."

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“Yes, Kate and Elliot, who would have thought?” he murmurs, and for some reason, he doesn’t look pleased.

“So what are you doing about work in Seattle?”

When are we going to talk about the limits? What’s his game?

“I have a couple of interviews for intern places.”

“You were going tell me this when?” He arches a brow.

“Err... I’m telling you now.”

He narrows his eyes.

“Where?”

For some reason, possibly because he might use his influence, I don’t want to tell him.

“A couple of publishing houses.”

“Is that what you want to do, something in publishing?”

I nod warily.

“Well?” He looks at me patiently waiting for more information.

“Well what?”

“Don’t be obtuse, Anastasia, which publishing houses?” he scolds.

“Just small ones,” I murmur.

“Why don’t you want me to know?”

“Undue influence.”

He frowns.

“Oh, now *you’re* being obtuse.”

He laughs.

“Obtuse? Me? God, you’re challenging. Drink up, let’s talk about these limits.” He fishes out another copy of my email and the list. Does he wander about with these lists in his pockets? I think there’s one in his jacket that I have. Shit, I’d better not forget that. I drain my cup.

He glances quickly at me.

“More?”

APPENDIX 3

Soft Limits

To be discussed and agreed between both parties:

Which of the following sexual acts are acceptable to the Submissive?

- Masturbation
- Fellatio
- Cunnilingus
- Vaginal intercourse
- Vaginal fisting
- Anal intercourse
- Anal fisting

“No fisting, you say. Anything else you object to?” he asks softly.

I swallow.

“Anal intercourse doesn’t exactly float my boat.”

“I’ll agree to the fisting, but I’d really like to claim your ass, Anastasia. But we’ll wait for that. Besides, it’s not something we can dive into,” he smirks at me. “Your ass will need training.”

“Training?” I whisper.

“Oh yes. It’ll need careful preparation. Anal intercourse can be very pleasurable, trust me. But if we try it and you don’t like it, we don’t have to do it again.” He grins down at me. I blink up at him. He thinks I’ll enjoy it? How does he know it’s pleasurable?

“Have you done that?” I whisper.

“Yes.”

Holy crap. I gasp.

“With a man?”

“No. I’ve never had sex with a man. Not my scene.”

“Mrs. Robinson?”

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He's staring down at me, gauging my reaction.

"Come," he murmurs and rises, dragging me up. Taking his jacket off, he drapes it over my shoulders and heads for the door.

Parked outside is a red hatchback car, a two-door compact Audi.

"It's for you. Happy graduation," he murmurs, pulling me into his arms and kissing my hair.

He's bought me a damned car, brand new by the looks of it. Jeez... I've had enough trouble with the books. I stare at it blankly, trying desperately to determine how I feel about this. I am appalled on one level, grateful on another, shocked that he's actually done it, but the overriding emotion is anger. Yes, I'm angry, especially after everything I told him about the books... but then he'd already bought this. Taking my hand, he leads me down the path toward this new acquisition.

"Anastasia, that Beetle of yours is old and frankly dangerous. I would never forgive myself if something happened to you when it's so easy for me to make it right," he trails off. His eyes are on me, but at the moment I cannot bring myself to look at him. I stand silently staring at its awesome bright red newness.

"I mentioned it to your stepfather. He was all for it," he murmurs.

Turning, I glare at him, my mouth open in horror.

"You mentioned this to Ray. How could you?" I can barely spit the words out. *How dare he?* Poor Ray. I feel sick, mortified for my dad.

"It's a gift, Anastasia. Can't you just say thank you?"

"But you know it's too much."

"Not to me it isn't, not for my peace of mind."

I frown at him, at a loss what to say. He just doesn't get it! He's had money all his life.

Okay, not all his life – not as a small child – and my world-view shifts. The thought is very sobering, and I soften towards the car, feeling guilty about my fit of pique. His intentions are good, misguided, but not from a bad place.

"I'm happy for you to loan this to me, like the laptop."

He sighs heavily.

"Okay. On loan. Indefinitely." He looks warily at me.

"No, not indefinitely, but for now. Thank you."

He frowns. I reach up and kiss him briefly on his cheek.

“That’s more like it. But I think you’ve had too much to drink.”

“Did you get me tipsy on purpose?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because you over-think everything, and you’re reticent like your stepdad. A drop of wine in you and you start talking, and I need you to communicate honestly with me. Otherwise you clam up, and I have no idea what you’re thinking. In vino veritas, Anastasia.”

“And you think you’re always honest with me?”

“I endeavor to be.” He looks down at me warily. “This will only work if we’re honest with each other.”

“I’d like you to stay and use this.” I hold up the second condom.

He smiles and his eyes glow with humor.

“Anastasia, I have crossed so many lines here tonight. I have to go. I’ll see you on Sunday. I’ll have the revised contract ready for you, and then we can really start to play.”

“Play?” *Holy shit.* My heart leaps into my mouth.

“I’d like to do a scene with you. But I won’t until you’ve signed, so I know you’re ready.”

“Oh. So I could stretch this out, if I don’t sign?”

He gazes at me assessing, and then his lips twitch into a smile.

“Well, I suppose you could, but I may crack under the strain.”

“Crack? How?” My inner goddess has woken and is paying attention.

He nods slowly, and then he grins, teasing.

“Could get really ugly.”

His grin is infectious.

“Ugly, how?”

“Oh you know, explosions, car chases, kidnapping, incarceration.”

“You’d kidnap me?”

“Oh yes,” he grins.

“Oh, Ana, I love you too, so much. Stay safe, honey.” I hang up and face Kate who glares at me.

“Has that obscenely rich fucker upset you again?”

“No... sort of... err... yes.”

“Just tell him to take a hike, Ana. You’ve been so up and down since you met him.

I’ve never seen you like this.”

The world of Katherine Kavanagh is very clear, very black and white. Not the intangible, mysterious, vague hues of gray that color my world. *Welcome to my world.*

“Sit, let’s talk. Let’s have some wine. Oh, you’ve had champagne.” She spies the bottle. “Some good stuff too.”

I smile ineffectually, looking apprehensively at the couch. I approach it with caution.

Hmm... sitting.

“Are you okay?”

“I fell over and landed on my behind.”

She doesn’t think to question my explanation, because I am one of the most un-coordinated people in Washington State. I never thought I’d see that as a blessing. I sit down gingerly, pleasantly surprised that I’m okay, and turn my attention to Kate, but my mind glazes over and I’m pulled back to the Heathman – “Well, if you were mine you wouldn’t be able to sit down for a week after the stunt you pulled yesterday.” He said it then, and all

I could concentrate on at the time was being his. All the warning signs were there, I was just too clueless and too enamored to notice.

Kate comes back into the living area with a bottle of red wine and washed teacups.

“Here we go.” She hands me a cup of wine. It won’t taste as good as the Bolly.

“Ana, if he’s a jerk with commitment issues, dump him. Though I don’t really understand his commitment issues. He couldn’t take his eyes off you in the marquee, watched you like a hawk. I’d say he was completely smitten, but maybe he has a funny way of showing it.”

Smitten? Christian? Funny way of showing it? I’ll say.

I stand immobilized at the entrance of the room, paralyzed by his beauty and the sweet anticipation of what's to come. The familiar charge between us is there, sparking slowly in my belly, drawing me to him.

"Hmm... that dress," he murmurs approvingly as he gazes down at me. "Welcome back, Miss Steele," he whispers, and clasping my chin, he leans down and proffers a gentle light kiss on my lips. The touch of his lips to mine reverberates throughout my body. My breath hitches.

"Hi," I whisper as I flush.

"You're on time. I like punctual. Come." He takes my hand and leads me to the couch. "I wanted to show you something," he says as we sit. He hands me the Seattle Times. On page eight, there's a photograph of the two of us together at the graduation ceremony. *Holy crap.* I'm in the paper. I check the caption.

Christian Grey and friend at the graduation ceremony at WSU Vancouver.

I laugh.

"So I'm your 'friend' now."

"So it would appear. And it's in the newspaper, so it must be true." He smirks.

Sitting beside me, his whole body is turned toward me, one of his legs tucked under the other. Reaching over, he tucks my hair behind my ear with his long index finger. My body comes alive at his touch, waiting and needful.

"So, Anastasia, you have a much better idea of what I'm about since you were last here."

"Yes." *Where's he going with this?*

"And yet you've returned."

I nod shyly, and his gray eyes blaze. He shakes his head slightly as if he's struggling with the idea.

"Have you eaten?" he asks out of the blue.

Shit.

"No."

"Are you hungry?" He's really trying not to look annoyed.

"Not for food," I whisper, and his nostrils flare slightly in reaction.

He leans forward and whispers in my ear.

"You are as eager as ever, Miss Steele, and just to let you into a little secret, so am I.

“You’re not going to come as well are you?” I gasp, shocked.

He laughs.

“I’d pay very good money to watch, believe me, Anastasia, but I don’t think the good doctor would approve.”

I take his hand, and he pulls me up into his arms and kisses me deeply. I clutch on to his arms, taken by surprise. His hand is in my hair holding my head, and he pulls me against him, his forehead against mine.

“I’m so glad you’re here,” he whispers. “I can’t wait to get you naked.”

Chapter Eighteen

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Dr. Greene is tall, blond, and immaculate, dressed in a royal blue suit. I’m reminded of the women who work in Christian’s office. She’s like an identikit model – another Stepford blonde. Her long hair is swept up in an elegant chignon. She must be in her early forties.

“Mr. Grey.” She shakes Christian’s outstretched hand.

“Thank you for coming at such short notice,” Christian says.

“Thank you for making it worth my while, Mr. Grey. Miss Steele.” She smiles, her eyes cool and assessing.

We shake hands, and I know she’s one of those women who doesn’t tolerate fools gladly. Like Kate. I like her immediately. She gives Christian a pointed stare, and after an awkward beat, he takes his cue.

“I’ll be downstairs,” he mutters, and he leaves what will be my bedroom.

“Well Miss Steele. Mr. Grey is paying me a small fortune to attend to you. What can I do for you?”

After a thorough examination and lengthy discussion, Dr. Greene and I decide on the mini pill. She writes me a pre-paid prescription and instructs me to pick them up tomorrow. I love her no-nonsense

Uncoiling from the floor, rising lazily, like a jungle cat, he points the end of the riding crop at my navel, leisurely circling it – tantalizing me. At the touch of the leather, I quiver and gasp. He walks round me again, trailing the crop around the middle of my body. On his second circuit, he suddenly flicks the crop, and it hits me underneath my behind... against my sex. I cry out in surprise as all my nerve endings stand to attention. I pull against the restraints. The shock runs through me, and it's the sweetest strangest, hedonistic feeling.

"Quiet," he whispers as he walks around me again, the crop slightly higher around the middle of my body. This time when he flicks it against me in the same place, I'm anticipating it... *oh my*. My body convulses at the sweet, stinging bite.

As he makes his way around me, he flicks again, this time hitting my nipple, and I throw my head back as my nerve endings sing. He hits the other... a brief, swift, sweet chastisement. My nipples harden and elongate from the assault, and I moan loudly, pulling on my leather cuffs.

"Does that feel good?" he breathes.

"Yes."

He hits me again across the buttocks. The crop stings this time.

"Yes what?"

"Yes, Sir," I whimper.

He comes to a stop... but I can no longer see him. My eyes are closed as I try to absorb the myriad of sensations coursing through my body. Very slowly, he rains small, biting licks of the crop down my belly, heading south. I know where this is leading, and I try and psyche myself up for it – but when he hits my clitoris, I cry out loudly.

"Oh... please!" I groan.

"Quiet," he orders, and he hits me again on my behind.

I did not expect this to be like this... I am lost. Lost in a sea of sensation. And suddenly, he's dragging the crop against my sex, through my pubic hair, down to the entrance of my vagina.

"See how wet you are for this, Anastasia. Open your eyes and your mouth."

I do as I'm told, completely seduced. He pushes the tip of the crop into my mouth, like my dream. *Holy shit*.

"See how you taste. Suck. Suck hard, baby."

My mouth closes around the crop as my eyes lock on his. I can taste the rich leather and the saltiness of my arousal. His eyes are blazing. He's in his element.

He pulls the tip from my mouth, and he stands forward and grabs me and kisses me hard, his tongue invading my mouth. Wrapping his arms around me, he pulls me against him. His chest crushes mine,

I'm refreshed but suddenly nervous. Holy cow, I am meeting his folks! He's just worked me over with a riding crop and tied me up using a cable tie which I sold him, for heaven's sake – and I'm going to meet his parents. It will be Kate's first time meeting them too – at least she'll be there for support. I roll my shoulders. They're stiff. His demands for a personal trainer don't seem so outlandish now, in fact, they're mandatory if I am to have any hope of keeping up with him.

I climb slowly out of bed and note that my dress is hanging outside the wardrobe and my bra is on the chair. Where are my panties? I check beneath the chair. Nothing. Then I remember – he squirreled them away in the pocket of his jeans. I flush at the memory, after he, I can't even bring myself to think about it, he was so – barbarous. I frown. *Why hasn't he given me back my panties?*

I steal into the bathroom, bewildered by my lack of underwear. While drying myself after my enjoyable but far too brief shower, I realize he's done this on purpose. He wants me to be embarrassed and ask for my panties back, and he'll either say yes or no. My inner goddess grins at me. *Hell... two can play that particular game.* Resolving there and then not to ask him for them and not give him that satisfaction, I shall go meet his parents sans culottes. *Anastasia Steele!* My subconscious chides me, but I don't want to listen to her – I almost hug myself with glee because I know this will drive him crazy.

Back in the bedroom, I put on my bra, slip into my dress, and climb into my shoes. I remove the braid and hastily brush out my hair, I then glance down at the drink he's left.

It's pale pink. What's this? Cranberry and sparkling water. Mmm... it tastes delicious and quenches my thirst.

Dashing back into the bathroom, I check myself in the mirror: eyes bright, cheeks slightly flushed, slightly smug look because of my party plan, and I head downstairs. Fifteen minutes. Not bad, Ana.

Christian is standing by the panoramic window, wearing the grey flannel pants that I love, the ones that hang in that unbelievably sexy way off his hips, and of course, a white linen shirt. Doesn't he have any other colors? Frank Sinatra sings softly over the surround sound speakers.

Christian turns and smiles as I enter. He looks at me expectantly.

"Hi," I say softly, and my sphinx-like smile meets his.

"Hi," he says. "How are you feeling?" His eyes are alight with amusement.

"Good, thanks. You?"

"I feel mighty fine, Miss Steele."

He is so waiting for me to say something.

"Frank. I never figured you for a Sinatra fan."

He raises his eyebrows at me, his look speculative.

"Eclectic taste, Miss Steele," he murmurs, and he paces toward me like a panther until he's standing

Christian leans over.

“Palm-twitchingly mad,” he whispers. “Especially now.” His tone is quiet and deadly.

Oh no. I squirm.

Grace reappears carrying two plates, followed by a pretty young woman with blonde pigtails, dressed smartly in pale blue, carrying a tray of plates. Her eyes immediately find Christian in the room. She blushes and gazes at him from under her long mascara’d lashes.

What!

Somewhere in the house the phone starts ringing.

“Excuse me,” Mr. Grey rises again and exits.

“Thank you, Gretchen,” Grace says gently, frowning as Mr. Grey exits. “Just leave the tray on the console.” Gretchen nods, and with another furtive glance at Christian, she leaves.

So the Greys have staff, and the staff are eyeing up *my* would-be Dominant. Can this evening get any worse? I scowl at my hands in my lap.

Mr. Grey returns.

“Call for you, darling. It’s the hospital,” he says to Grace.

“Please start, everyone,” Grace smiles as she hands me a plate and leaves.

It smells delicious – chorizo and scallops with roasted red peppers and shallots, sprinkled with flat leafed parsley. And in spite of the fact that my stomach is churning from Christian’s veiled threats, the surreptitious glances from pretty little Miss Pigtails, and the debacle of my missing underwear, I am starving. I flush as I realize it’s the physical effort of this afternoon that’s given me such an appetite.

Moments later Grace returns, her brow furrowed. Mr. Grey cocks his head to one side... like Christian.

“Everything okay?”

“Another measles case,” Grace sighs.

“Oh no.”

“Yes, a child. The fourth case this month. If only people would get their kids vacci-nated.” She shakes her head sadly, and then smiles. “I’m so glad our children never went through that. They never caught anything worse than chicken pox, thank goodness. Poor Elliot,” she says as she sits down, smiling indulgently at her son. Elliot frowns mid chew and squirms uncomfortably. “Christian and Mia were lucky. They got it so mildly, only a spot to share between them.”

embrace me, pulling me to him. His hands find their way into my hair, and he kisses me back, hard and possessive. His tongue and my tongue twist and turn together, consuming each other. He tastes divine.

He pulls back suddenly, our collective breathing ragged and mingling. My hands drop to his arms and he glares down at me.

“What are you doing to me?” he whispers confused.

“Kissing you.”

“You said no.”

“What?” *No to what?*

“At the dinner table, with your legs.”

Oh... that's what this is all about.

“But we were at your parents’ dining table.” I stare up at him, completely bewildered.

“No one’s ever said no to me before. And it’s so – hot.”

His eyes widen slightly, filled with wonder and lust. It’s a heady mix. I swallow instinctively. His hand moves down to my behind. He pulls me sharply against him and I can feel his erection.

Oh my...

“You’re mad and turned on because I said no?” I breathe, astonished.

“I’m mad because you never mentioned Georgia to me. I’m mad because you went drinking with that guy who tried to seduce you when you were drunk and who left you when you were ill with an almost complete stranger. What kind of friend does that? And I’m mad and aroused because you closed your legs on me.” His eyes glitter dangerously, and he’s slowly inching up the hem of my dress.

“I want you, and I want you now. And if you’re not going to let me spank you – which you deserve – I’m going to fuck you on the couch this minute, quickly, for my pleasure, not yours.”

My dress is now barely covering my naked behind. He moves suddenly so that his hand is cupping my sex, and one of his fingers sinks slowly into me. His other arm holds me firmly in place around my waist. I suppress my moan.

“This is mine,” he whispers aggressively. “All mine. Do you understand?” He eases his finger in and out as he gazes down at me, gauging my reaction, his eyes burning.

“Yes, yours,” I breathe as my desire, hot and heavy, surges through my bloodstream, affecting... everything. My nerve endings, my breathing, my heart is pounding, trying to leave my chest, the blood thrumming in my ears.

He stares at me.

“I’m too intense?”

I burst out laughing.

“That’s putting it mildly!”

In the light of the passing street lamps, I see his lips quirk up.

“Are you laughing at me, Miss Steele?”

“I wouldn’t dare, Mr. Grey,” I reply with mock seriousness.

“I think you dare, and I think you do laugh at me, frequently.”

“You are quite funny.”

“Funny?”

“Oh yes.”

“Funny peculiar or funny ha ha?”

“Oh... a lot of one and some of the other.”

“Which way round?”

“I’ll leave you to figure that out.”

“I’m not sure if I can figure anything out around you, Anastasia,” he says sardonically, and then continues quietly, “What do you need to think about in Georgia?”

“Us,” I whisper.

He stares at me, impassive.

“You said you’d try,” he murmurs.

“I know.”

“Are you having second thoughts?”

“Possibly.”

He shifts as if uncomfortable.

“Why?”

Holy crap. How did this suddenly become such an intense and meaningful conversation? It’s been

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“You know, you never did tell me why you don’t like to be touched.”

He blanches, and his reaction makes me feel guilty for asking.

“I’ve told you more than I’ve ever told anybody.” His voice is quiet as he gazes at me impassively.

And it’s clear to me that he’s never confided in anyone. Doesn’t he have any close friends? Perhaps he told Mrs. Robinson? I want to ask him, but I can’t – I can’t pry that invasively. I shake my head at the realization. He really is an island.

“Will you think about our arrangement while you’re away?” he asks.

“Yes.”

“Will you miss me?”

I gaze at him, surprised by his question.

“Yes,” I answer honestly.

How could he mean so much to me in such a short time? He’s got right under my skin... literally. He smiles and his eyes light up.

“I’ll miss you too. More than you know,” he breathes.

My heart warms at his words. He really is trying hard. He gently strokes my cheek, bends down, and kisses me softly.

It is late afternoon, and I sit nervous and fidgeting in the lobby waiting for Mr. J. Hyde of Seattle Independent Publishing. This is my second interview today, and the one I’m most anxious about. My first interview went well, but it was for a larger conglomerate with offices based throughout the US, and I would be one of many editorial assistants there. I can imagine being swallowed up and spat out pretty quickly in such a corporate machine.

SIP is where I want to be. It’s small and unconventional, championing local authors, and has an interesting and quirky roster of clients.

My surroundings are sparse, but I think it’s a design statement rather than frugality. I am seated on one of two dark green chesterfield couches made of leather – not unlike the couch that Christian has in his playroom. I stroke the leather appreciatively and wonder idly what Christian does on that couch. My mind wanders as I think of the possibilities... no – I must not go there now. I flush at my wayward and inappropriate thoughts.

The receptionist is a young African-American woman with large silver earrings and long straightened hair. She has a bohemian look about her, the sort of woman I could be friendly with. The thought is comforting. Every few moments, she glances at up me, away from her computer and smiles reassuringly. I tentatively return her smile.

My flight is booked; my mother is in seventh heaven that I am visiting; I am packed, and Kate has

jeans, and a dark blue bandana.

“Good, thanks, Kate. Not sure this outfit was cool enough for the second interview.”

“Oh?”

“Boho chic might have done it.”

Kate raises an eyebrow.

“You and boho chic.” She cocks her head to one side - Gah! Why is everyone reminding me of my favorite Fifty Shades? “Actually, Ana, you’re one of the few people who could really pull that look off.”

I grin.

“I really liked the second place. I think I could fit in there. The guy who interviewed me was unnerving though,” I trail off – shit I’m talking to foghorn Kavanagh here. *Shut up Ana!*

“Oh?” The Katherine Kavanagh radar for an interesting tidbit of information swoops into action – a tidbit that will only resurface at some inopportune and embarrassing moment, which reminds me.

“Incidentally – will you please stop winding Christian up? Your comment about José at dinner yesterday was out of line. He’s a jealous guy. It doesn’t do any good, you know.”

“Look, if he wasn’t Elliot’s brother I’d have said a lot worse. He’s a real control freak.

I don’t know how you stand it. I was trying to make him jealous – give him a little help with his commitment issues.” She holds her hands up defensively. “But – if you don’t want me to interfere, I won’t,” she says hastily at my scowl.

“Good. Life with Christian is complicated enough, trust me.”

Jeez, I sound like him.

“Ana,” she pauses staring at me. “You’re okay, aren’t you? You’re not running to your mother’s to escape?”

I flush.

“No Kate. It was you who said I needed a break.”

She closes the distance between us and takes my hands – a most un-Kate thing to do.

Oh no... tears threaten.

“You’re just, I don’t know... different. I hope you’re okay, and whatever issues you’re having with Mr. Moneybags, you can talk to me. And I will try not to wind him up, though frankly it’s like shooting fish in a barrel with him. Look, Ana, if something’s wrong, you will tell me, I won’t judge.

From: Christian Grey

Subject: Language. Watch Your Mouth!

Date: May 30 2011 19:22

To: Anastasia Steele

Anastasia

Mrs. Jones is a valued employee. I have never had any relationship with her beyond our professional one. I do not employ anyone I've had any sexual relations with. I am shocked that you would think so. The only person I would make an exception to this rule is you – because you are a bright young woman with remarkable negotiating skills.

Though, if you continue to use such language, I may have to reconsider taking you on here. I am glad you have limited experience. Your experience will continue to be limited

– just to me. I shall take impeccable as a compliment – though with you, I'm never sure if that's what you mean, or if your sense of irony is getting the better of you – as usual.

Christian Grey

CEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings Inc. From His Ivory Tower **From:** Anastasia Steele

Subject: Not for all the Tea in China

Date: May 30 2011 19:27

To: Christian Grey

Dear Mr. Grey

I think I have already expressed my reservations about working for your company. My views on this have not changed, are not changing, and will not change, ever. I must leave you now as Kate has returned with food. My sense of irony and I, bid you goodnight.

I will contact you once I'm in Georgia.

Ana



From: Christian Grey

Subject: Even Twinings English Breakfast Tea?

Date: May 30 2011 19:29

To: Anastasia Steele

Goodnight Anastasia.

I hope you and your sense of irony have a safe flight.

Christian Grey

CEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings Inc.

Kate and I pull up outside the drop-off area at Sea-Tac Airport terminal. Leaning across, she hugs me.

“Enjoy Barbados, Kate. Have a wonderful holiday.”

“I’ll see you when I get back. Don’t let old moneybags grind you down.”

“I won’t.”

We hug again – and then I’m on my own. I head over to check-in and stand in line, waiting with my carry-on luggage. I haven’t bothered with a suitcase, just a smart rucksack that Ray gave me for my last birthday.

“Ticket please?” The bored young man behind the desk holds up his hand without looking at me.

Mirroring his boredom, I hand over my ticket and my driver’s license as ID. I am hoping for a window seat if at all possible.

“Okay, Miss Steele. You’ve been upgraded to first class.”

“What?”

“Ma’am, if you’d like to go through to the first class lounge and await your flight there.” He seems to have woken up and is beaming at me like I’m the Christmas Fairy and the Easter Bunny rolled into one.

“Surely there’s some mistake.”

“No, no.” He checks his computer screen again. “Anastasia Steele – upgrade.” He simpers at me.

Ugh. I narrow my eyes. He hands me my boarding pass, and I head towards the first class lounge muttering under my breath. Damn Christian Grey, interfering control freak –

he just can’t leave well enough alone.

Subject: You're Most Welcome

Date: May 30 2011 21:59

To: Anastasia Steele

Dear Miss Steele

Dr. Flynn is back, and I have an appointment this week.

Who was massaging your back?

Christian Grey

CEO with friends in the right places, Grey Enterprises Holdings Inc.

Aha! Pay back time. Our flight has been called so I shall email him from the plane. It will be safer. I almost hug myself with mischievous glee.

There is so much room in first class. Champagne cocktail in hand, I settle myself into the sumptuous leather window seat as the cabin slowly fills. I call Ray to tell him where I am

– a mercifully brief call, as it's so late for him.

"Love you, Dad," I murmur.

"You too, Annie. Say hi to your mom. Goodnight."

"Goodnight." I hang up.

Ray is in good form. I stare at my Mac and with the same childish glee building.

Opening my laptop, I log into the email program.

From: Anastasia Steele

Subject: Strong Able Hands

Date: May 30 2011 22:22

To: Christian Grey

Dear Sir

A very pleasant young man massaged my back. Yes. Very pleasant indeed. I wouldn't have encountered Jean-Paul in the ordinary departure lounge – so thank you again for that treat. I'm not sure if I'll be allowed to email once we take off, and I need my beauty sleep since I've not been

Date: May 30 2011 22:25

To: Anastasia Steele

Dear Miss Steele

I know what you're trying to do – and trust me – you've succeeded. Next time you'll be in the cargo hold, bound and gagged in a crate. Believe me when I say that attending to you in that state will give me so much more pleasure than merely upgrading your ticket.

I look forward to your return.

Christian Grey

Palm-Twitching CEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings Inc.

Holy crap. That's the problem with Christian's humor – I can be never be sure if he's joking or if he's seriously angry. I suspect on this occasion he's seriously angry. Surreptitiously, so the flight attendant can't see, I type a reply under the blanket.

From: Anastasia Steele

Subject: Joking?

Date: May 30 2011 22:30

To: Christian Grey

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You see – I have no idea if you're joking – and if you're not – then I think I'll stay in Georgia. Crates are a hard limit for me. Sorry I made you mad. Tell me you forgive me.

A

From: Christian Grey

Subject: Joking

Date: May 30 2011 22:31

To: Anastasia Steele

How can you be emailing? Are you risking the life of everyone on board, including yourself, by using your BlackBerry? I think that contravenes one of the rules.

Christian Grey

CEO & Eye Roller, Grey Enterprises Holdings Inc.

From: Anastasia Steele

Subject: Eye Rolling

Date: May 31 2011 19:14 EST

To: Christian Grey

Dear Mr. Grey

Stop emailing me. I am trying to get ready for dinner. You are very distracting, even when you are on the other side of the continent. And yes—she spansks you when you roll your eyes?

Your Ana

I press send, and immediately the image of that evil witch Mrs. Robinson comes into my mind. I just can't picture it. Christian being beaten by someone as old as my mother, it's just so wrong. Again I wonder what damage she's wrought. My mouth sets in a hard grim line. I need a doll to stick pins in, maybe that way I can vent some of the anger I feel at this stranger.

From: Christian Grey

Subject: Your behind

Date: May 31 2011 16:18

To: Anastasia Steele

Dear Miss Steele

I still prefer my title to yours, in so many different ways. It is lucky that I am master of my own destiny and no one castigates me. Except my mother occasionally and Dr. Flynn, of course. And you.

Christian Grey

CEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings Inc.

“Christian, this is my mother, Carla.” My ingrained manners take over.

He turns to greet my mom.

“Mrs. Adams, I am delighted to meet you.”

How does he know her name? He gives her the heart-stopping, Christian Grey patented, full-blown-no-prisoners-taken smile. She doesn’t have a hope. My mother’s lower jaw practically hits the table. *Jeez, get a grip Mom.* She takes his proffered hand and they shake. My mother hasn’t replied. Oh, complete dumbfounded speechlessness is genetic

– I had no idea.

“Christian,” she manages finally, breathlessly.

He smiles knowingly at her, his gray eyes twinkling. I narrow my eyes at them both.

“What are you doing here?” My question sounds more brittle than I mean, and his smile disappears, his expression now guarded. I am thrilled to see him, but completely thrown off balance, my anger about Mrs. Robinson simmering through my veins. I don’t know if I want to shout at him or throw myself into his arms – but I don’t think he’d like either – and I want to know how long he has been watching us. I’m also a little anxious about the email I just sent him.

“I came to see you, of course.” He gazes down at me impassively. *Oh, what is he thinking?* “I’m staying in this hotel.”

“You’re staying here?” I sound like a sophomore on amphetamines, too high-pitched even for my own ears.

“Well, yesterday you said you wished I was here.” He pauses trying to gauge my reaction. “We aim to please, Miss Steele.” His voice is quiet with no trace of humor.

Crap – Is he mad? Maybe the Mrs. Robinson comments? Or the fact that I am on my third, soon to be fourth Cosmo? My mother is glancing anxiously at the two of us.

“Won’t you join us for a drink, Christian?” She waves to the waiter who is at her side in a nanosecond.

“I’ll have a gin and tonic,” Christian says. “Hendricks if you have it or Bombay Sapphire. Cucumber with the Hendricks, lime with the Bombay.”

Holy hell... only Christian could make a meal out of ordering a drink.

“And two more Cosmos please,” I add, looking anxiously at Christian. I am drinking with my mother – no way can he be angry about that.

“Please pull up a chair, Christian.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Adams.”

“All the redundancy packages concluded?... And the cost?... ” Christian whistles between his teeth. “Sheesh... that was one expensive mistake... And Lucas? ... ”

I glance around the room. He’s in a suite, like the one at the Heathman. The furnishings here are ultra modern, very now. All muted dark purples and golds with bronze starbursts on the walls. Christian walks over to dark wood unit and pulls open a door to reveal a mini-bar. He indicates that I should help myself, then wanders into the bedroom.

I assume it’s so I can no longer hear his conversation. I shrug. He didn’t stop his call when I entered his study that time. I hear water running... he’s filling a bath. I help myself to an orange juice. He ambles back into the room.

“Have Andrea send me the schematics. Barney said he’d cracked the problem... ”

Christian laughs. “No, Friday... There’s a plot of land here that I’m interested in... Yeah, get Bill to call... No, tomorrow... I want to see what Georgia will offer if we move in.”

Christian doesn’t take his eyes off me. Handing me a glass, he points to an ice bucket.

“If their incentives are attractive enough... I think we should consider it, though I’m not sure about the damned heat here... I agree Detroit has its advantages too, and it’s cooler...” His face darkens momentarily. *Why?* “Get Bill to call. Tomorrow... Not too early.” He hangs up and stares at me, his face unreadable, and the silence stretches between us. Okay... my turn to talk.

“You didn’t answer my question,” I murmur.

“No. I didn’t,” he says quietly, his gray eyes wide and cautious.

“No you didn’t answer my question or no you didn’t love her?”

He folds his arms and leans against the wall, and a small smile plays upon his lips.

“What are you doing here, Anastasia?”

“I’ve just told you.”

He takes a deep breath.

“No. I didn’t love her.” He frowns at me, amused yet puzzled.

I can’t believe I’m holding my breath. I sag like an old cloth sack as I release it. *Well, thank heavens for that.* How would I feel if he actually loved the witch?

“You’re quite the green-eyed goddess, Anastasia. Who would have thought?”

“Are you making fun of me, Mr. Grey?”

“I wouldn’t dare.” He shakes his head solemnly, but he has a wicked gleam in his eye.

He sighs and steps down into the bath opposite me, his jaw clenched with tension, his eyes frosty. As he gracefully submerges his body beneath the water, he's careful not to touch me. *Jeez – have I made him that mad?*

He stares impassively at me, his face unreadable, saying nothing. Again the silence stretches between us, but I hold my counsel. It's your turn Grey – I am not caving this time.

My subconscious is nervous, anxiously biting her nails – this could go either way. Christian and I stare at each other, but I am not backing down. Eventually, after what seems like a millennium, he shakes his head, and he smirks.

“I would probably have gone the way of my birth mother, had it not been for Mrs. Robinson.”

Oh! I blink at him. Crack addict or whore? Possibly both?

“She loved me in a way I found... acceptable,” he adds with a shrug.

What the hell does that mean?

“Acceptable?” I whisper.

“Yes.” He stares intently at me. “She distracted me from the destructive path I found myself following. It's very hard to grow up in a perfect family when you're not perfect.”

Oh no. My mouth dries as I digest his words. He gazes at me, his expression unfathomable. He's not going to tell me any more. How frustrating. Inside, I'm reeling – he sounds so full of self-loathing. And Mrs. Robinson loved him. *Holy shit...* does she still?

I feel like I've been kicked in the stomach.

“Does she still love you?”

“I don't think so, not like that.” He frowns as if he hasn't thought about the idea. “I keep telling you it was a long time ago. It's in the past. I couldn't change it even if I wanted to, which I don't. She saved me from myself.” He's exasperated and runs a wet hand through his hair. “I've never discussed this with anyone.” He pauses, “Except Dr.

Flynn, of course. And the only reason I'm talking about this now, to you, is because I want you to trust me.”

“I do trust you, but I do want to know you better, and whenever I try to talk to you, you distract me. There's so much I want to know.”

“Oh for pity's sake, Anastasia. What do you want to know? What do I have to do?” His eyes blaze, and though he doesn't raise his voice, I know he's trying to rein in his temper.

I glance quickly down at my hands, clear beneath the water as the bubbles have started to disperse.

time... Well, that was good... hot.

“No, not really,” I whisper.

“It’s more the idea of it?” he prompts.

“I suppose. Feeling pleasure, when one isn’t supposed to.”

“I remember feeling the same. Takes a while to get your head around it.”

Holy hell. This was when he was a kid.

“You can always safe-word, Anastasia. Don’t forget that. And, as long as you follow the rules, which fulfill a deep need in me for control and to keep you safe, then perhaps we can find a way forward.”

“Why do you need to control me?”

“Because it satisfies a need in me that wasn’t met in my formative years.”

“So it’s a form of therapy?”

“I’ve not thought of it like that, but yes, I suppose it is.”

This I can understand. This will help.

“But, here’s the thing – one moment you say don’t defy me, the next you say you like to be challenged. That’s a very fine line to tread successfully.”

He gazes at me for a moment, then frowns.

“I can see that. But you seem to be doing fine so far.”

“But at what personal cost? I’m tied up in knots here.”

“I like you tied up in knots,” he smirks.

“That’s not what I meant!” I splash him in exasperation.

He gazes down at me, arching an eyebrow.

“Did you just splash me?”

“Yes.” *Holy shit... that look.*

“Oh, Miss Steele.” He grabs me and pulls me onto his lap, sloshing water all over the floor. “I think we’ve done enough talking for now.”

He clasps his hands on either side of my head and kisses me. Deeply. Possessing my mouth. Angling my head... controlling me. I moan against his lips. This is what he likes. This is what he’s so good at. Everything ignites inside me and my fingers are in his hair, holding him to me, and I’m kissing him

“Do you want to sleep?” Christian asks, his voice soft. He is beautiful; the mix of colors in his hair vivid against the white Egyptian cotton pillowcase, gray eyes, smoldering, expressive. He looks concerned.

“No. I’m not tired.” I feel strangely energized. It’s been so good to talk – I don’t want to stop.

“What do you want to do?” he asks.

“Talk.”

He smiles.

“About what?”

“Stuff.”

“What stuff?”

“You.”

“What about me?”

“What’s your favorite film?”

He grins.

“Today, it’s ‘The Piano’ ”

His grin is infectious.

“Of course. Silly me. Such a sad, exciting score, which no doubt you can play? So many accomplishments, Mr. Grey.”

“And the greatest one is you, Miss Steele.”

“So I am number seventeen.”

He frowns at me not comprehending.

“Seventeen?”

“Number of women you’ve um... had sex with.”

His lips quirk up, his eyes shining with incredulity.

“Not exactly.”

“You said fifteen,” My confusion is obvious.

“I was referring to the number of women in my playroom. I thought that’s what you meant. You didn’t

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my fingers through his chest hair.

“Anastasia.”

No. I moan.

“Come on, baby.”

No. *I want to touch you.*

“Wake up.”

No. *Please.* My eyes flicker unwillingly open for a split second. I’m in bed and someone is nuzzling my ear.

“Wake up, baby,” he whispers, and the effect of his sweet voice spreads like warm melted caramel through my veins.

It’s Christian. Jeez, it’s still dark, and the images of him from my dream persists, disconcerting and tantalizing in my head.

“Oh... no,” I groan. I want back at his chest, back to my dream. Why is he waking me?

It’s the middle of the night, or so it feels. *Holy shit.* Does he want sex – now?

“Time to get up, baby. I’m going to switch on the sidelight.” His voice is quiet.

“No,” I groan.

“I want to chase the dawn with you,” he says, kissing my face, my eyelids, the tip of my nose, my mouth, and I open my eyes. The sidelight is on. “Good morning, beautiful,”

he murmurs.

I groan, and he smiles.

“You are not a morning person,” he murmurs.

Through the haze of light, I squint and see Christian leaning over me, smiling. Amused.

Amused at me. Dressed! In black.

“I thought you wanted sex,” I grumble.

“Anastasia, I always want sex with you. It’s heartwarming to know that you feel the same,” he says dryly.

I gaze at him as my eyes adjust to the light, but he still looks amused... thank heavens.

“Of course I do, just not when it’s so late.”

Christian Grey's iPod, this should be interesting. I scroll through the touch screen, and find the perfect song. I press play. I wouldn't have figured him for a Britney fan. The club-mix, techno beat assaults us both, and Christian turns the volume down. Maybe it's too early for this: Britney's at her most sultry.

"Toxic, eh?" Christian grins.

"I don't know what you mean." I feign innocence.

He turns the music down a little more, and inside I am hugging myself. My inner goddess is standing on the podium awaiting her gold medal. He turned the music down.

Victory!

"I didn't put that song on my iPod," he says casually, and puts his foot down so that I am thrown back into my seat as the car accelerates along the freeway.

What? He knows what he's doing, the bastard. *Who did?* And I have to listen to Britney going on and on. *Who... who?*

The song ends and the iPod shuffles to Damien Rice being mournful. *Who? Who?* I stare out of the window, my stomach churning. Who?

"It was Leila," he answers my unspoken thoughts. *How does he do that?*

"Leila?"

"An ex, who put the song on my iPod."

Damien warbles away in the background as I sit stunned. An ex... ex-submissive? An ex- "One of the fifteen?" I ask.

"Yes."

"What happened to her?"

"We finished."

"Why?"

Oh jeez. It's too early for this kind of conversation. But he looks relaxed, happy even, and what's more, talkative.

"She wanted more." His voice is low, introspective even, and he leaves the sentence hanging between us, ending it with that powerful little word again.

"And you didn't?" I ask before I can employ my brain to mouth filter. Shit, do I want to know?

He shakes his head.

Gliding! We're going gliding?

He switches off the engine.

“You up for this?” he asks.

“You’re flying?”

“Yes.”

“Yes, please!” I don’t hesitate. He grins and leans forward and kisses me.

“Another first, Miss Steele,” he says as he climbs out of the car.

First? What sort of first? First time flying a glider... shit! No – he said that he’s done it before. I relax. He walks round and opens my door. The sky has turned to a subtle opal, shimmering and glowing softly behind the sporadic childlike clouds. Dawn is upon us.

Taking my hand, Christian leads me round the building to a large stretch of tarmac where several planes are parked. Waiting beside them is a man with a shaved head and a wild look in his eye, accompanied by Taylor.

Taylor! Does Christian go any where without that man? I hear about him, and he smiles kindly back at me.

“Mr. Grey, this is your tow-pilot, Mr. Mark Benson,” says Taylor. Christian and Benson shake hands and strike up a conversation which sounds very technical about wind speed, directions, and the like.

“Hello, Taylor,” I murmur shyly.

“Miss Steele.” He nods a greeting at me, and I frown. “Ana,” he corrects himself.

“He’s been hell on wheels the last few days. Glad we’re here,” he says conspiratorially.

Oh, this is news – Why? Surely not because of me! Revelation Thursday! Must be something in the Savannah water that makes these men loosen up a bit.

“Anastasia,” Christian summons me. “Come.” He holds out his hand.

“See you later.” I smile at Taylor, and giving me a quick salute, he heads back to the parking lot.

“Mr. Benson, this is my girlfriend Anastasia Steele.”

“Pleased to meet you,” I murmur as we shake hands.

Benson gives me a dazzling smile.

“Likewise,” he says, and I can tell from his accent that he’s British.

As I take Christian’s hand, there’s a mounting excitement in my belly. *Wow... gliding!* We follow

Mark Benson out across the tarmac towards the runway. He and Christian keep up a running conversation. I catch the gist. We will be in a Blanik L-23, which is apparently better than the L-13, although this is open to debate. Benson will be flying a Piper Pawnee. He's been flying tail draggers for about five years now. It all means nothing to me, but glancing up at Christian, he is so animated, so in his element, it's a pleasure to watch him.

The plane itself is long, sleek, and white with orange stripes. It has a small cockpit with two seats one in front of the other. It's attached by a long white cable to a small, conventional single-propeller plane. Benson opens the large, clear Perspex dome that frames the cockpit, allowing us to climb in.

"First we need to strap on your parachute."

Parachute!

"I'll do that," Christian interrupts him and takes the harness off Benson, who smiles amenably at him.

"I'll fetch some ballast," Benson says and heads toward the plane.

"You like strapping me into things." I observe dryly.

"Miss Steele, you have no idea. Here, step into the straps."

I do as I'm told, placing my arm on his shoulder. Christian stiffens slightly but doesn't move. Once my feet are in the loops, he pulls the parachute up and I place my arms through the shoulder straps. Deftly he fastens the harness and tightens all the straps.

"There, you'll do," he says mildly, but his eyes are gleaming. "Do you have your hair tie from yesterday?"

I nod.

"You want me to put my hair up?"

"Yes."

I quickly do as I'm asked.

"In you go," Christian commands. He's still so bossy. I go to climb into the back.

"No, front. Pilot sits at the back."

"But won't you be able to see?"

"I'll see plenty." He grins.

I don't think I have ever seen him so happy, bossy, but happy. I clamber in, settling down into the leather seat. It is surprisingly comfortable. Christian leans over, pulls the harness over my shoulders, reaches between my legs for the lower belt, and slots it into the fastener that rests against my belly. He tightens all the restraining straps.

Oh shit. He's going to make me fly the plane. *No!*

"Go on, Anastasia. Grab it," he urges more vehemently.

Tentatively, I grasp it and feel the pitch and yaw of what I assume are rudders and paddles or whatever keeps this thing in the air.

"Hold tight... keep it steady. See the middle dial in front? Keep the needle dead center." My heart is in my mouth. *Holy shit.* I am flying a glider... I'm soaring.

"Good girl." Christian sounds delighted.

"I am amazed you let me take control," I shout.

"You'd be amazed what I'd let you do, Miss Steele. Back to me now."

I feel the joystick move suddenly, and I let go as we spiral down several feet, my ears starting to pop again. The ground is getting closer, and it feels like we could be hitting it shortly. Jeez, that's scary.

"BMA, this is BG N Papa 3 Alpha, entering left downwind runway seven to the grass, BMA." Christian sounds his usual authoritative self. The tower squawks back at him over the radio, but I don't understand what they say. We sail round again in a wide circle, sinking slowly to the ground. I can see the airport, the landing strips, and we're flying back over - 55.

"Hang on, baby. This can get bumpy."

After another circle we dip and suddenly we are on the ground with a brief thump, racing along the grass – *holy shit.* My teeth chatter as I lurch at an alarming speed along the ground, until we finally come to a stop. The plane sways slightly then dips to the right.

I take a deep lungful of air while Christian leans over and opens the cockpit lid, clambering out and stretching.

"How was that?" he asks, and his eyes are a shining, dazzling silver gray. He leans down to unbuckle me.

"That was extraordinary. Thank you," I whisper.

"Was it more?" he asks, his voice tinged with hope.

"Much more," I breathe, and he grins.

"Come." He holds out his hand for me, and I clamber out of the cockpit.

As soon as I'm out, he grabs me and holds me flush against his body. Suddenly his hand is in my hair, tugging it so my head tips back, and his other hand travels down to the base of my spine. He kisses me, long, hard, and passionately, his tongue in my mouth.

His breathing is mounting, his ardor ... *Holy cow* – his erection... we're in a field. But I don't care.

“I need to work, Anastasia, but I’ll be back this evening. What time?”

I ignore the unwelcome stab of disappointment. Why do I want to spend every single minute with this controlling sex god? Oh yes, I’ve fallen in love with him, and he can fly.

“Thank you... for the more.”

“My pleasure, Anastasia.” He kisses me, and I inhale his sexy Christian smell.

“I’ll see you later.”

“Try and stop me,” he whispers.

I wave goodbye as he drives off into the Georgia sunshine. I’m still wearing his sweatshirt and his underwear, and I’m too warm.

In the kitchen, my mom is in a complete flap. It’s not every day she has to entertain a multi-zillionaire, and it’s stressing her out.

“How are you, darling?” she asks, and I flush because she must know what I was doing last night.

“I’m good. Christian took me gliding this morning.” I hope the new information will distract her.

“Gliding? As in a small plane with no engine? That sort of gliding?”

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I nod.

“Wow.”

She’s speechless – a novel concept for my mother. She gapes at me, but eventually recovers herself and resumes her original line of questioning.

“How was last night? Did you talk?”

Jeez. I flush bright scarlet.

“We talked – last night and today. It’s getting better.”

“Good.” She turns her attention back to the four cookery books she has open on the kitchen table.

I beam at my mom.

“You have a job?”

I nod gleefully, and she squeals and hugs me in the middle of Publix supermarket.

“Congratulations, darling! We have to buy some champagne!” She’s clapping her hands and jumping up and down. *Is she forty-two or twelve?*

I glance down at my phone and frown, there’s a missed call from Christian. He never phones me. I call him straight back.

“Anastasia,” he answers immediately.

“Hi,” I murmur shyly.

“I have to return to Seattle. Something’s come up. I am on my way to Hilton Head now. Please apologize to your mother – I can’t make dinner.” He sounds very businesslike.

“Nothing serious, I hope?”

“I have a situation which I have to deal with. I’ll see you Friday. I’ll send Taylor to collect you from the airport if I can’t come myself.” He sounds cold. Angry even. But for the first time, I don’t immediately think it’s me.

“Okay. I hope you sort out your situation. Have a safe flight.”

“You too, baby,” he breathes, and with those words, my Christian is back briefly. Then he hangs up.

Oh no. The last ‘situation’ he had was my virginity. *Jeez, I hope it’s nothing like that.*

I gaze at my mom. Her earlier jubilation has metamorphosed into concern.

“It’s Christian, he’s had to go back to Seattle. He apologizes.”

“Oh! That’s a shame, darling. We can still have our barbecue, and now we have something to celebrate – your new job! You have to tell me all about it.”

It’s late afternoon, and Mom and I are lying beside the pool. My mother has relaxed to the point where she is literally horizontal now that Mr. Megabucks is not coming to dinner. As I lie in the sun, endeavoring to lose the pale, I think about yesterday evening and breakfast today. I think about Christian, and my ridiculous grin refuses to subside. It keeps creeping across my face, unbidden and disconcerting, as I recall our various conversations and what we did... what he did.

Unzipping his fly, he frees himself, grabs the backs of my thighs, and lifts me.

“Wrap your legs around me, baby,” he commands, his voice urgent, strained.

I do as I’m told and wrap my arms around his neck, and he moves quickly and sharply, filling me. *Ah!* He gasps, and I groan. Holding my behind, his fingers digging into my soft flesh, he begins to move, slowly at first – a steady even tempo... but as his control unravels, he speeds up... faster, and faster. *Ahhh!* I tip my head back and concentrate on the invading, punishing, heavenly sensation... pushing me, pushing me... onward, higher, up... and when I can take no more, I explode around him, spiraling into an intense, all-consuming orgasm. He lets go with a deep growl, and he buries his head in my neck as he buries himself inside me, groaning loudly and incoherently as he finds his release.

His breathing is erratic, but he kisses me tenderly, not moving, still inside me, and I blink, unseeing into his eyes. As he comes into focus, he gently pulls out of me, holding me steady while I place my feet on the floor. The bathroom is now cloudy with steam...

and hot. I feel overdressed.

“You seem pleased to see me,” I murmur with a shy smile.

His lips quirk up.

“Yes, Miss Steele, I think my pleasure is pretty self-evident. Come – let me get you in the shower.”

He undoes the next three buttons of his shirt, removes the cufflinks, tugs it over his head, and discards it on the floor. Removing his suit pants and boxer briefs, he kicks them to one side. He begins to undo the buttons on my blouse while I watch him, yearning to reach out and stroke his chest, but I contain myself.

“How was your journey?” he asks mildly. He seems so much calmer now, his apprehension gone, dissolved by sexual congress.

“Fine, thank you,” I murmur, still breathless. “Thanks once again for first class. It really is a much nicer way to travel.” I smile shyly at him. “I have some news,” I add nervously.

“Oh?” he looks down at me as he undoes the last button, slips my blouse down my arms, and throws it on top of his discarded clothes.

“I have a job.”

He stills, then smiles at me, his eyes warm and soft.

“Congratulations, Miss Steele. Now will you tell me where?” he teases.

“You don’t know?”

He shakes his head, frowning slightly.

“Why would I know?”

“Yes, but only if you break the rules.”

“I’ll need to re-read them,” I say, trying to recall the detail.

“I’ll fetch them for you.” His tone is suddenly businesslike.

Whoa. This has gotten serious so quickly. He rises from the piano and walks lithely to his study. My scalp prickles. Jeez, I need some tea. The future of our so-called relationship is being discussed at 5:45 in the morning when he’s pre-occupied with something else

– is this wise? I head into the kitchen which is still shrouded in darkness. Where are the light switches? I find them, flick them on, and pour water into the kettle. *My pill!* I rum-mage in my purse that I left on the breakfast bar and find them quickly. One swallow, and I’m done. By the time I finish, Christian is back, sitting on one of the bar stools, watching me intently.

“Here you go.” He pushes a typed piece of paper toward me, and I notice that he’s crossed some things out.

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and exhales slightly.

“I’m sorry,” I whisper.

He opens his eyes and looks at me puzzled.

“What for?”

“What I said.”

“You didn’t tell me anything I didn’t know.” And his eyes soften with relief. “I am sorry I hurt you.”

I shrug.

“I asked for it.” And now I know. I swallow. Here goes. I need to say my piece. “I don’t think I can be everything you want me to be,” I whisper. His eyes widen slightly, and he blinks, his fearful expression returning.

“You are everything I want you to be.”

What?

“I don’t understand. I’m not obedient, and you can be as sure as hell I’m not going to let you do *that* to me again. And that’s what you need, you said so.”

He closes his eyes again, and I can see a myriad of emotions cross his face. When he reopens them, his expression is bleak. *Oh no.*

“You’re right. I should let you go. I am no good for you.”

My scalp prickles as every single hair follicle on my body stands to attention, and the world falls away from me, leaving a wide, yawning abyss for me to fall into. *Oh no.*

“I don’t want to go,” I whisper. Fuck – this is it. Pay or play. Tears swim in my eyes once more.

“I don’t want you to go either,” he whispers, his voice raw. He reaches up and gently strokes my cheek and wipes away a falling tear with his thumb. “I’ve come alive since I met you.” His thumb traces the contours of my lower lip.

“Me too,” I whisper, “I’ve fallen in love with you, Christian.”

His eyes widen again, but this time, with pure, undiluted fear.

“No,” he breathes as if I’ve knocked the wind out of him.

Oh no.

“You can’t love me, Ana. No... that’s wrong.” He’s horrified.

“Wrong? Why’s it wrong?”

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