

CHAPTER ONE

I have survived Day Three Post-Christian, and my first day at work. It has been a welcome distraction. The time has flown by in a haze of new faces, work to do, and Mr. Jack Hyde.

Mr. Jack Hyde... He smiles down at me, his blue eyes twinkling, as he leans against my desk. "Excellent work, Ana. I think we're going to make a great team."

Somehow, I manage to curl my lips in a semblance of a smile. "I'll be off, if that's okay with you."

"Of course, it's five thirty. I'll see you tomorrow," he says.

"Good night, Jack."

"Good night, Ana."

Collecting my bag, I shrug on my jacket and head for the door. Out in the early evening air of Seattle, I take a deep breath. It doesn't begin to fill the void in my chest...a void that's been present since Saturday morning—a painful hollow reminder of my loss. I walk toward the bus stop with my head down, staring at my feet contemplating the loss of my beloved Wanda, my old Beetle...and the Audi. I shut the door on that thought immediately. No. Don't think about him. Of course, I can afford a car—a nice, new car. I suspect he's been overgenerous in his payment, and the thought leaves a bitter taste in my mouth, but I dismiss it and try to keep my mind as numb and as blank as possible. I can't think about him. I don't want to start crying again—not out on the street.

The apartment is empty... Kateless. I miss my friend and imagine her lying on a beach in Barbados sipping a cool cocktail. I turn on the flat-screen television so there's noise to fill the vacuum and provide the illusion of company, but I don't listen or watch. All I can do is sit and stare blankly at the brick wall. I'm numb. I feel nothing but the pain.

How long must I endure this?

The door buzzer startles me from my anguish, and my heart skips a beat. *Who could that be?* I press the intercom, my scalp prickling in sudden anticipation.

“Delivery for Ms. Steele.” A bored, disembodied voice answers, and my disappointment is overwhelming. Listlessly, I make my way downstairs to find a young man holding a large cardboard box, leaning against the front door, and noisily chewing gum. I sign for the package and take it upstairs. The box is huge but surprisingly light. Inside are two dozen long-stemmed, white roses and a card.

Congratulations on your first day at work.

I hope it went well.

And thank you for the glider. That was very thoughtful.

It has pride of place on my desk.

Christian

I stare at the typed card as the hollow in my chest expands. No doubt his assistant sent this. Christian probably had very little to do with it but it’s too painful to think about and I contemplate chucking them in the trash. But they’re beautiful... I can’t bring myself to throw them away. Dutifully, I make my way over to the kitchen to hunt down a vase.

SO A PATTERN DEVELOPS: wake, work, cry, sleep. Well, try to sleep. I can’t even escape him in my dreams. Burning gray eyes, his lost look, his hair burnished and bright, all haunt me. And the music...so much music—I cannot bear to hear any music so I’m careful to avoid it. Even the jingles in commercials make me shudder.

I’ve spoken to no one outside work, not even my mother or Ray. I don’t have the capacity for idle talk. No, I want none of it. I’ve become my own island state. A war-torn land where nothing grows and the horizons are bleak. Yes, that’s me. I can interact impersonally at Seattle Independent Publishing, but that’s it. If I talk to Mom, I know I’ll break even further—and I’ve nothing left to break.

I’M FINDING IT DIFFICULT to eat—I have no appetite. By lunchtime on Wednesday, I manage a cup of yogurt, and it’s the first thing I’ve eaten

since Friday. I'm surviving on a newfound tolerance for lattes and Diet Coke. It's the caffeine that keeps me going, but it's making me anxious.

Jack has started to hover, irritating me and asking personal questions. What does he want? I'm polite, but I need to keep him at arm's length.

After lunch, I begin scanning through a pile of correspondence addressed to him, and I'm pleased with the distraction of menial work. My email pings, and I quickly check to see who it's from.

Holy shit. An email from Christian. *Oh no, not here...not at work.*

From: Christian Grey
Subject: Tomorrow
Date: June 8 2011 14:05
To: Anastasia Steele

Dear Anastasia

Forgive this intrusion at work. I hope that it's going well. Did you get my flowers?

I note that tomorrow is the gallery opening for your friend's show, and I'm sure you've not had time to purchase a car, and it's a long drive. I would be more than happy to take you—should you wish.

Let me know.

Christian Grey
CEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings, Inc.

His words blur as tears swim in my eyes. I don't want to break down in the office so I hastily leave my desk and bolt to the restroom to escape into one of the stalls.

He's emailed me. I can't believe it. Does he miss me? I wrap my arms around myself, close my eyes, and allow myself a moment that this might be why he's contacted me. And what a perfect excuse—José's show. I'd forgotten all about it, and I promised José I'd go.

Crap, Christian's right. How am I going to get there?

Why hasn't José phoned? Come to think of it, why hasn't anyone phoned? I've been so absent I haven't noticed that my cell phone has been silent. I clutch my forehead. *Shit! I'm such an idiot!* I still have it set to forward calls to the BlackBerry. *Holy crap.* Christian's been getting my

calls—unless he’s just thrown the BlackBerry away. Is that why he emailed? And he knows me email address! How did he get my email address?

He knows my shoe size; an email address is hardly going to present him with many problems.

Can I see him again? Could I bear it? Do I want to see him? I close my eyes and tilt my head back as grief and longing overcome me in equal measure. Of course I do.

Perhaps—perhaps I can tell him I’ve changed my mind...

No, no, no. I cannot be with someone who takes pleasure in inflicting pain on me, someone who can’t love me.

Torturous memories flash through my mind—the gliding, holding hands, kissing, the bathtub, his gentleness, his humor, and his dark, brooding, sexy stare. I miss him. It’s been five days, five days of agony that has felt like an eternity. I cry myself to sleep at night, wishing I hadn’t walked out, wishing he could be different, wishing I could be different...wishing we were together. How long will this harrowing feeling last? I’m in purgatory.

I wrap my arms around my body again, hugging myself tightly, holding myself together. I miss him. I really miss him... I love him. Simple.

Anastasia Steele, you are at work! I must be strong, but I want to go to José’s show, and deep down, the masochist in me wants to see Christian. Taking a deep breath, I head back to my desk and respond to his email.

From: Anastasia Steele

Subject: Tomorrow

Date: June 8 2011 14:25

To: Christian Grey

Hi Christian

Thank you for the flowers; they are lovely.

Yes, I would appreciate a lift.

Thank you.

Anastasia Steele
Assistant to Jack Hyde, Editor, SIP

I check my phone and find that it is set to forward calls to the BlackBerry. I cancel this setting, and as Jack is in a meeting, I call José.

“Hi, José. It’s Ana.”

“Hello, stranger.” His tone is so warm and welcoming it’s almost enough to push me over the edge again.

“I can’t talk long. What time should I be there tomorrow for your show?”

“You’re still coming?” He sounds excited.

“Yes, of course.” I smile my first genuine smile in five days as I picture his broad grin.

“Seven thirty.”

“See you then. Goodbye, José.”

“Bye, Ana.”

My email pings with a reply from Christian.

From: Christian Grey
Subject: Tomorrow
Date: June 8 2011 14:27
To: Anastasia Steele

Dear Anastasia

What time shall I pick you up?

Christian Grey
CEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings, Inc.

From: Anastasia Steele
Subject: Tomorrow
Date: June 8 2011 14:32
To: Christian Grey

José’s show starts at 7:30. What time would you suggest?

Anastasia Steele
Assistant to Jack Hyde, Editor, SIP

From: Christian Grey
Subject: Tomorrow
Date: June 8 2011 14:34
To: Anastasia Steele

Dear Anastasia

Portland is some distance away. I shall pick you up at 5:45.

I look forward to seeing you.

Christian Grey
CEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings, Inc.

From: Anastasia Steele
Subject: Tomorrow
Date: June 8 2011 14:38
To: Christian Grey

See you then.

Anastasia Steele
Assistant to Jack Hyde, Editor, SIP

Oh my. I'm going to see Christian, and for the first time in five days, my spirits lift a fraction and I allow myself to wonder how he's been.

Has he missed me? Probably not like I've missed him. Has he found a new submissive? The thought is so painful that I shut it down immediately. I turn to the pile of correspondence I need to sort for Jack as I endeavor to push Christian out of my mind once more.

That night in bed, I toss and turn, and it's the first time in a while I haven't cried myself to sleep. Instead, I'm hounded by memories of Christian Grey.

In my mind's eye, I see him that last time, standing in his foyer watching me as the elevator doors closed. His tortured expression haunts me. I'll remember it for as long as live. He didn't want me to go, which made no sense. But why would I stay when things had reached such an impasse? We were each skirting around our own issues—my fear of punishment, his fear of...what? Love?

Turning on my side, I hug my pillow, my hand on the deflated

Charlie Tango balloon beneath it, and I'm filled with an overwhelming sadness. He thinks he doesn't deserve to be loved. Why? Does it have to do with his upbringing? His birth mom, the crack whore? I don't have any answers, but my thoughts plague me into the early hours until eventually I fall into a fitful, exhausted sleep.

THE DAY DRAGS AND drags, and Jack is unusually attentive. I suspect it's due to my plum dress and the black high-heeled boots, but I don't dwell on the thought. I resolve to go clothes shopping with my first paycheck. The dress is looser on me than it was, but I pretend not to notice.

Finally it's 5:30, and I collect my jacket and purse, trying to quell my nerves. *I'm going to see him!*

"Do you have a date tonight?" Jack asks as he strolls past my desk on his way out.

"Yes. No. Not really."

He raises an eyebrow, his interest clearly piqued. "Boyfriend?"

I flush. This is too personal. "No, a friend. An ex-boyfriend."

"Maybe tomorrow you'd like to come for a drink after work. You've had a stellar first week, Ana. We should celebrate." He smiles but his eyes remain cool and assessing, making me uneasy. Putting his hands in his pockets, he saunters through the double doors. I frown at his retreating back. Drinks with the boss. Is that a good idea?

I shake my head. I have an evening of Christian Grey to get through first. How am I going to do this? I hurry into the restroom to make some last-minute adjustments.

In the large mirror on the wall, I take a long, hard look at my face. I'm my usual pale self, with dark circles beneath too-large eyes so I look gaunt and haunted. And not for the first time, I wish I knew how to use makeup. I apply some mascara and eyeliner and pinch my cheeks, hoping for some color. Then I fluff my hair so it hangs artfully down my back and take a deep breath. This will have to do.

I walk through the foyer and give a smile and a wave to Claire at Reception, which she returns enthusiastically. I hope she and I will become friends, when I'm feeling more like myself.

Jack is talking to Elizabeth as I head for the doors. Smiling broadly, he hurries over to open them for me. "After you, Ana," he says.

“Thank you.” I smile, embarrassed.

Outside on the curb, Taylor is waiting. He opens the rear door of the car. I glance hesitantly at Jack, who’s followed me out. He’s looking toward the Audi SUV with curiosity.

I turn and climb into the back, and there he sits—Christian Grey—wearing his gray suit, no tie, white shirt open at the collar. His gray eyes are glowing. My mouth dries. He looks glorious, except he’s scowling. *Why?*

“When did you last eat?” he snaps as Taylor closes the door behind me.

Crap. “Hello, Christian. Yes, it’s nice to see you, too.”

“I don’t want your smart mouth now. Answer me.” His eyes blaze.

“Um...I had a yogurt at lunchtime. Oh—and a banana.”

“When did you last have a real meal?” he asks acidly.

Taylor slips into the driver’s seat, starts the car, and pulls out into the traffic.

I glance up and Jack is waving at me, though how he can see me through the dark glass, I don’t know. I wave back.

“Who’s that?” Christian snaps.

“My boss.” I peek up at the beautiful man beside me, and his mouth is pressed into a hard line.

“Well? Your last meal?”

“Christian, that really is none of your concern,” I answer, feeling extraordinarily brave.

“Whatever you do concerns me. Tell me.”

No, it doesn’t. I groan in frustration, rolling my eyes heavenward, and Christian narrows his. And for the first time in a long time, I want to laugh. I try hard to stifle the giggle that threatens to escape. Christian’s face softens as I struggle to keep a straight face, and a trace of a smile kisses his lovely sculptured lips.

“Well?” he asks, his voice softer.

“Pasta alla Vongole, last Friday,” I whisper.

He closes his eyes as fury, and possibly regret, sweeps across his face. “I see,” he says, his voice expressionless. “You look like you’ve lost at least five pounds, possibly more since then. Please eat, Anastasia.”

I stare down at the knotted fingers in my lap. Why does he always make me feel like an errant child?

He shifts and turns toward me. “How are you?” His voice is still soft. *Well, I’m shit, really...* I swallow. “If I told you I was fine, I’d be lying.”

He inhales sharply. “Me, too.” He reaches over and clasps my hand. “I miss you.”

Oh no. Skin against skin.

“Christian, I—”

“Ana, please. We need to talk.”

I’m going to cry. No. “Christian, I... Please... I’ve cried so much.” I try to keep my emotions in check.

“Oh, baby, no.” He tugs my hand, and before I know it, I’m on his lap. He has his arms around me, and his nose is in my hair. “I’ve missed you so much, Anastasia.”

I want to struggle out of his hold, to maintain some distance, but his arms are wrapped around me. He’s pressing me to his chest and I melt. Oh, this is where I want to be.

I rest my head against him, and he kisses my hair. This is home. He smells of linen, fabric softener, body wash, and my favorite smell—Christian. For a moment, I allow myself the illusion that all will be well, and it soothes my fractured soul.

A few minutes later, Taylor pulls to a stop at the curb, even though we’re still in the city.

“Come.” Christian shifts me off his lap. “We’re here.”

What?

“Helipad—on the top of this building.” Christian glances toward the building by way of explanation.

Of course. *Charlie Tango.*

Taylor opens the door and I slide out. He gives me a warm, avuncular smile that makes me feel safe.

I smile back. “I should give you back your handkerchief.”

“Keep it, Miss Steele, with my best wishes.”

I blush as Christian comes around the car and takes my hand. He looks quizzically at Taylor, who stares impassively back at him, revealing nothing.

“Nine?” Christian says to him.

“Yes, sir.”

Christian nods as he turns and leads me through the double doors into the grandiose foyer. I revel in the feel of his hand and his long, skilled fingers curled around mine. The familiar pull is there—I'm drawn, Icarus to his sun. And I've been burned already, yet here I am again.

Reaching the elevators, he presses the Call button. I peek up at him, and he's wearing his enigmatic half smile. As the doors open, he releases my hand and ushers me in.

The doors close and I risk a second peek. He glances down at me, and it's there in the air between us, that electricity. It's palpable. I can almost taste it, pulsing between us, drawing us together.

"Oh my," I breathe as I bask briefly in the intensity of this visceral, primal attraction.

"I feel it, too," he says, his eyes clouded and intense.

Desire pools dark and deadly in my groin. He clasps my hand and grazes my knuckles with his thumb, and muscles, deep inside me, clench tightly...deliciously.

How can he still do this to me?

"Please don't bite your lip, Anastasia." His voice is low and husky.

I peer up at him, releasing my lip. I want him. Here, now, in the elevator. How could I not?

"You know what it does to me," he whispers.

Oh, I still affect him. My inner goddess stirs from her five-day sulk.

The doors open abruptly, breaking the spell between us, and we're on the roof. It's windy, and despite my jacket, I'm cold. Christian puts his arm around me, pulling me into his side, and we hurry across to where *Charlie Tango* stands in the center of the helipad with its rotor blades slowly spinning.

A tall, blond, square-jawed man in a dark suit leaps out and, ducking low, runs toward us. Shaking hands with Christian, he shouts above the noise of the rotors. "Ready to go, sir. She's all yours!"

"All checks done?"

"Yes, sir."

"You'll collect her around eight thirty?"

"Yes, sir."

"Taylor's waiting for you out front."

“Thank you, Mr. Grey. Safe flight to Portland. Ma’am.” He salutes me.

Without releasing me, Christian nods, ducks down, and leads me to the helicopter door.

Once inside, he buckles me firmly into my harness, cinching the straps tight. He gives me a knowing look and his secret smile. “This should keep you in your place,” he says. “I must say, I like this harness on you. Don’t touch anything.”

For a moment I’m back in the playroom, but he distracts me from that thought, running his index finger down my cheek before handing me headphones. *I’d like to touch you, too, but you won’t let me.* Besides, he’s pulled the straps so tight I can barely move.

He sits in his seat and buckles himself in, then starts running through all his preflight checks. He’s just so competent...it’s alluring. He puts on his headphones and flips a switch and the rotors speed up, deafening me.

Turning, he gazes at me. “Ready, baby?” His voice echoes through the headphones.

“Yes.”

He grins his boyish grin. Wow—I’ve not seen it for so long.

“Sea-Tac tower, this is *Charlie Tango Golf*,” he says, then asks for permission to take-off. The disembodied voice of the air traffic controller answers, issuing instructions and Christian flips two switches, grasps the stick, and the helicopter rises slowly and smoothly into the evening sky.

Seattle and my stomach drop away from us, and there’s so much to see.

“We’ve chased the dawn, Anastasia. Now the dusk,” he says through the headphones.

I turn and gape at him in surprise. What does this mean? How is it that he can say the most romantic things? He grins, and I can’t help but respond with a shy smile.

“As well as the evening sun, there’s more to see this time,” he continues.

The last time we flew to Seattle, it was dark, but this evening the view is spectacular. We’re up among the tallest buildings, going higher and higher.

“Escala’s over there.” He points toward the building. “Boeing there—and you can just see the Space Needle.”

I crane my head. “I’ve never been.”

“I’ll take you. We can eat there.”

“Christian, we broke up.”

“I know. I can still take you there. And feed you.” He glares at me.

I shake my head and decide not to antagonize him. “It’s very beautiful up here. Thank you.”

“Impressive, isn’t it?”

“Impressive that you can do this.”

“Flattery from you, Miss Steele? But I’m a man of many talents.”

“I’m fully aware of that, Mr. Grey.”

He turns, flashing me his trademark smirk, and for the first time in five days, I relax a little. Perhaps this won’t be so bad.

“How’s the new job?” He changes the subject.

“Good, thank you. Interesting.”

“What’s your boss like?”

“Oh. He’s okay.” How can I tell Christian that Jack makes me uncomfortable? Christian glances at me.

“What’s wrong?” he asks.

“Aside from the obvious, nothing.”

“The obvious?”

“Oh, Christian, you really are very obtuse sometimes.”

“Obtuse? Me? I’m not sure I appreciate your tone, Miss Steele.”

“Well, don’t, then.”

His lips twitch into a smile. “I’ve missed your smart mouth, Anastasia.”

I inhale sharply and want to shout *I’ve missed you—all of you—not just your mouth!* But I keep quiet and gaze out the glass fishbowl that is *Charlie Tango’s* windshield as we continue south. The dusk is to our right, the sun low on the horizon—blazing a fiery orange—and I’m Icarus once more, flying far too close.

THE DUSK FOLLOWS US from Seattle—the sky is awash with opal, pinks, and aquamarines woven together as only Mother Nature knows how. It’s a clear, crisp evening, and the lights of Portland twinkle and

wink, welcoming us as Christian sets the helicopter down on the helipad. We are on top of the brown-brick building in Portland we left less than three weeks ago.

It's been hardly any time at all. Yet I feel like I've known Christian for a lifetime. He powers down *Charlie Tango*, flipping various switches bringing the rotors to a stop. Eventually all I hear is my own breathing through the headphones and it reminds me of the Thomas Tallis experience. I blanch. I don't want to think about that right now.

Christian unbuckles his harness and leans across to undo mine. "Good trip, Miss Steele?" he asks, his voice mild, his eyes glowing.

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Grey."

"Well, let's go see the boy's photos." He holds out his hand and together we climb out of *Charlie Tango*.

A gray-haired man with a beard and a broad grin walks over to meet us and I recognize him as the old-timer from the last time we were here.

"Joe." Christian smiles and releases my hand to shake Joe's warmly. "Keep her safe for Stephan. He'll be along around eight or nine."

"Will do, Mr. Grey. Ma'am," he says, nodding at me. "Your car's waiting downstairs, sir. Oh, and the elevator's out of order. You'll need to use the stairs."

"Thank you, Joe." Christian takes my hand, and we head to the emergency stairs. "Good thing for you this is only three floors—in those heels," he mutters in disapproval.

No kidding.

"Don't you like the boots?"

"I like them very much, Anastasia." His gaze darkens, and I think he might say something else, but he stops. "Come. We'll take it slow. I don't want you falling and breaking your neck."

WE SIT IN SILENCE as our driver takes us to the gallery. My anxiety has returned full force, and I realize that while we were in *Charlie Tango* we'd been in the eye of the storm. Christian is quiet and brooding...apprehensive even; our lighter mood from earlier has dissipated. There's so much I want to say, but this journey is too short. Christian stares pensively out the window and I wonder what he's thinking about.

"José is just a friend," I murmur.

Christian turns to gaze at me, his eyes dark and guarded, giving nothing away. His mouth... Oh, his mouth is distracting and unbidden I remember it on me—everywhere. My skin heats.

He shifts in his seat and frowns. “Those beautiful eyes look too large in your face, Anastasia. Please tell me you’ll eat.”

“Yes, Christian, I’ll eat,” I answer automatically, a platitude.

“I mean it.”

“Do you, now?” I cannot keep the disdain from my voice. Honestly, the audacity of this man—this man who’s put me through hell over the past few days. No, that’s wrong. I’ve put myself through hell. No. It’s him.

I shake my head, confused.

“I don’t want to fight with you, Anastasia. I want you back, and I want you healthy,” he says.

What? “But nothing’s changed.” *You’re still fifty shades.*

“Let’s talk on the way back. We’re here.”

The car pulls up in front of the gallery, and Christian climbs out, leaving me speechless. He opens the car door for me, and I clamber out.

“Why do you do that?” My voice is louder than I expected.

“Do what?” Christian is taken aback.

“Say something like that and then just stop.”

“Anastasia, we’re here. Where you want to be. Let’s do this and then talk. I don’t particularly want a scene in the street.”

I glance around. He’s right. It’s too public. I press my lips together as he studies me. “Okay,” I mutter sulkily.

Clasping my hand, he leads me into the building. The gallery is housed in a converted warehouse—brick walls, dark-wood floors, white ceilings, and white pipe work. It’s airy and modern, and there are several people wandering across the gallery floor, sipping wine and admiring José’s work. For a moment, my troubles melt away as I grasp that José has realized his dream. *Way to go, José!*

“Good evening and welcome to José Rodríguez’s show.” A young woman greets us dressed in black with very short brown hair, bright-red lipstick, and large hooped earrings. She glances at me, then much longer than is strictly necessary at Christian, then turns back to me, blushing.

My brow creases. *He's mine*—or was. I try hard not to scowl at her.

Her eyes regain their focus. “Oh, it’s you, Ana. We’ll want your take on all this, too.” Grinning, she hands me a brochure and directs me to a table laden with drinks and snacks.

“You know her?” Christian frowns.

I shake my head, equally puzzled.

He shrugs, distracted. “What would you like to drink?”

“I’ll have a glass of white wine, thank you.”

His brow furrows, but he holds his tongue and heads for the open bar.

“Ana!” José comes barreling through a throng of people.

Holy cow! He’s wearing a suit. He looks good and he’s beaming at me. He folds me in his arms, hugging me hard. And it’s all I can do not to burst into tears. Tears pool in my eyes, which I hastily blink away.

“Ana, I’m so glad you made it,” he whispers in my ear before holding me at arm’s length.

“What?”

“Hey, are you okay? You look...well, odd. Dios mío, have you lost weight?”

Not him, too. “José, I’m fine. I’m just so happy for you. Congratulations on the show.” My voice wavers as I see the concern etched on his oh-so-familiar face, but I have to hold myself together.

“How did you get here?” he asks.

“Christian brought me.”

“Oh.” José’s face falls and he releases me. “Where is he?” His expression darkens.

“Over there, fetching drinks.” I nod in Christian’s direction and notice he’s exchanging pleasantries with someone waiting in line. Christian glances up and our eyes lock. And in that moment, I’m paralyzed, staring at an impossibly handsome man whose scorching gaze sears me with some unfathomable emotion...and for a nano-second we’re lost in each other. This beautiful man wants me back, and deep inside, sweet joy slowly unfurls like a morning glory in the early dawn.

“Ana!” José distracts me, and reluctantly I drag my gaze from Christian’s. “I’m so glad you came. Listen, I should warn you—”

Suddenly, Miss Very Short Hair and Red Lipstick cuts him off. “José, the journalist from the *Portland Printz* is here to see you. Come on.” She gives me a polite smile.

“How cool is this? The fame.” He grins, and I grin back. He’s so happy. “Catch you later, Ana.” He kisses my cheek, and I watch him stroll over to a young woman standing by a tall, lanky photographer.

José’s photographs are everywhere and, in some cases, blown up onto huge canvases. There are both monochromes and colors. There’s an ethereal beauty to many of the landscapes. In one taken near the lake at Vancouver, it’s early evening and pink clouds are reflected in the stillness of the water. Briefly, I’m transported by the tranquility and the peace. It’s stunning.

Christian joins me and hands me a glass of white wine.

“Does it come up to scratch?” My voice sounds more normal.

He frowns.

“The wine.”

“No. Rarely does at these kinds of events. The boy’s quite talented, isn’t he?” Christian is admiring the lake photo.

“Why else do you think I asked him to take your portrait?” I state, unable to hide my pride in José.

Christian’s eyes glide impassively from the photograph to me.

“Christian Grey?” The photographer from the *Portland Printz* approaches him. “Can I have a picture, sir?”

“Sure.” Christian hides his irritation.

I step back, but he grabs my hand and pulls me to his side.

The photographer looks at both of us and can’t hide his surprise. He snaps a couple of photos. “Mr. Grey, thank you. Miss...?”

“Ana Steele,” I reply.

“Thank you, Miss Steele.” He scurries off.

I turn to Christian. “I looked for pictures of you with dates on the internet. There aren’t any. That’s why Kate thought you were gay.”

Christian’s mouth twitches into a smile. “That explains your inappropriate question. No—I don’t do dates, Anastasia, only with you. But you know that.” His voice is quiet with sincerity.

“So you never took your”—I glance around nervously to check no one can overhear us—“subs out?”

“Sometimes. Not on dates. Shopping, you know.” He shrugs, his eyes not leaving mine.

Oh, I don’t know what to think about that.

“Just you, Anastasia,” he whispers.

I stare down at my fingers. In his own way, he does care about me.

“Your friend here seems more of a landscape man, not portraits,” he says. “Let’s look around.” I take his outstretched hand.

We wander past a few more prints, and I notice a couple nodding in my direction, smiling broadly as if they know me. It must be because I’m with Christian, but one young man is blatantly staring. *Odd.*

We turn the corner, and I see why I’ve been getting strange looks. Hanging on the far wall are seven huge portraits—of me.

Stupefied, I stare blankly at them, the blood draining from my face. Me—pouting, laughing, scowling, serious, amused. All super close-up, all in black and white.

Holy shit! I remember José messing with the camera on a couple of occasions when he was visiting and when I’d been out with him as driver and photographer’s assistant. He took snapshots, or so I thought. Not these invasive candid shots.

Christian is staring, transfixed, at each of the pictures in turn. “Seems I’m not the only one,” he mutters cryptically, his mouth settling into a hard line.

I think he’s angry.

“Excuse me.” He pins me with his bright gaze and heads to the reception desk.

What’s his problem now? I watch mesmerized as he talks animatedly with Miss Very Short Hair and Red Lipstick. He fishes out his wallet and produces his credit card.

Shit. He must have bought one of them.

“Hey. You’re the muse. These photographs are terrific.” A young man with a shock of bright-blond hair startles me. I feel a hand at my elbow and Christian is back.

“You’re a lucky guy.” Blond Shock says to Christian, who gives him a cold stare.

“That I am,” he mutters darkly as he pulls me over to one side.

“Did you just buy one of these?”

“One of these?” he snorts, not taking his eyes off them.

“You bought more than one?”

He rolls his eyes. “I bought them all, Anastasia. I don’t want some stranger ogling you in the privacy of their home.”

My first inclination is to laugh. “You’d rather it was you?”

He frowns, caught off guard by my audacity, I think, but he’s trying to hide his amusement. “Frankly, yes.”

“Pervert,” I mouth at him and bite my lower lip to prevent my smile.

His mouth drops open, and now his amusement is obvious. He strokes his chin thoughtfully. “Can’t argue with that assessment, Anastasia.” He shakes his head, and his eyes soften with humor.

“I’d discuss it further with you, but I’ve signed an NDA.”

He sighs and his eyes darken. Leaning in, he murmurs in my ear, “What I’d like to do to your smart mouth.”

I gasp, knowing full well what he means. “You’re very rude.” I try to sound shocked and succeed. Has he no boundaries?

He’s amused, but then his face falls. “You look very relaxed in these photographs, Anastasia. I don’t see you like that very often.”

What? Whoa! Change of subject—talk about non sequitur, from playful to serious.

I glance away, but he places his fingers beneath my chin and tilts my head back. I inhale sharply at the contact as deep inside me, that joy stirs again. “I want you that relaxed with me,” he says.

But how can that be? We have issues.

“You have to stop intimidating me if you want that,” I snap.

“You have to learn to communicate and tell me how you feel!” he snaps back, eyes blazing.

I take a deep breath. “Christian, you wanted me as a submissive. That’s where the problem lies. It’s in the definition of a submissive—you emailed it to me once.” I pause, trying to recall the wording. “I think the synonyms were, and I quote, ‘compliant, pliant, amenable, passive, tractable, resigned, patient, docile, tame, subdued.’ I wasn’t supposed to look at you. Not talk to you, unless you gave me permission to do so. What do you expect?”

His frown deepens as I continue.

“It’s very confusing being with you. You don’t want me to defy you,

but then you like my ‘smart mouth.’ You want obedience except when you don’t so that you can punish me. I just don’t know which way is up when I’m with you.”

His eyes frost. “Good point well made, as usual, Miss Steele.” His voice is frigid. “Come, let’s go eat.”

“We’ve only been here for half an hour.”

“You’ve seen the photos. You’ve spoken to the boy.”

“His name is José.”

“You’ve spoken to *José*—the man who, if I am not mistaken, was trying to push his tongue into your mouth the last time I met him, while you were drunk and ill,” he snarls.

“He’s never hit me,” I spit.

Christian scowls, fury emanating from every pore. “That’s a low blow, Anastasia.”

I pale, and Christian runs his hands through his hair, bristling with barely contained anger. I glare back at him.

“I’m taking you for something to eat. You’re fading away in front of me. Find the boy, say goodbye.”

“Please, can we stay longer?”

“No. Go. Now. Say goodbye.”

I glower at him, my blood boiling. Mr. Damned Control Freak. Angry is good. Angry is better than tearful.

I drag my gaze away from him and scan the room for José. He’s talking to a group of young women. I stalk toward him and away from Fifty. Just because he brought me here, I have to do as he says? Who the hell does he think he is?

The girls are hanging on José’s every word. One of them gasps as I approach, no doubt recognizing me from the portraits.

“José.”

“Ana. Excuse me, girls.” José grins at them and puts his arm around me, and on some level I’m amused—José all smooth, impressing the ladies. “You look mad,” he says.

“I have to go,” I mutter.

“You just got here.”

“I know, but Christian needs to get back. The pictures are fantastic, José—you’re very talented.”

He beams. "It was so cool seeing you."

José sweeps me into a big bear hug, spinning me around so I can see Christian across the gallery. He's scowling, and I realize it's because I'm in José's embrace. In a calculated move, I wrap my arms around José's neck. I think Christian is going to expire. His glare darkens to something quite sinister, and slowly he makes his way toward us.

"Thanks for the warning about the portraits of me," I mumble.

"Shit. Sorry, Ana. I should have told you. D'you like them?"

"Um... I don't know," I answer truthfully, momentarily knocked off balance by his question.

"Well, they're all sold, so somebody likes them. How cool is that? You're a poster girl." He hugs me tighter as Christian reaches us, glowering, though fortunately José doesn't see.

José releases me. "Don't be a stranger, Ana. Oh, Mr. Grey, good evening."

"Mr. Rodriguez, very impressive." Christian sounds icily polite. "I'm sorry we can't stay longer, but we need to head back to Seattle. Anastasia?" He subtly stresses *we* and takes my hand as he does so.

"Bye, José. Congratulations again." I give him a quick kiss on the cheek, and before I know it, Christian is dragging me out of the building. I know he's boiling with silent wrath, but so am I.

He looks quickly up and down the street, then heads left and suddenly sweeps me into a side alley, abruptly pushing me up against a wall. He grabs my face between his hands, forcing me to look up into his ardent, determined eyes. I gasp, and his mouth swoops down. He's kissing me, forcefully. Our teeth briefly clash, then his tongue is in my mouth.

Desire explodes like the Fourth of July throughout my body, and I'm kissing him back, matching his fervor, my hands knotting in his hair, pulling it, hard. He groans, a low sexy sound in the back of his throat that reverberates through me, and his hand moves down my body to the top of my thigh, his fingers digging into my flesh through the plum dress.

I pour all the angst and heartbreak of the past few days into our kiss, binding him to me, and it hits me—in this moment of blinding passion—he's doing the same, he feels the same.

He breaks off the kiss, panting. His eyes are luminous with desire, firing the already heated blood that is pounding through my body. My mouth is slack as I try to drag precious air into my lungs.

“You. Are. Mine.” he snarls, emphasizing each word. He pushes away from me and bends, hands on his knees as if he’s run a marathon. “For the love of God, Ana.”

I lean against the wall, panting, trying to control my riotous reaction...trying to find my equilibrium.

“I’m sorry,” I whisper once my breath has returned.

“You should be. I know what you’re doing. Do you want the photographer, Anastasia? He obviously has feelings for you.”

I shake my head guiltily. “No. He’s just a friend.”

“I have spent all my adult life trying to avoid any extreme emotion. Yet you...you bring out feelings in me that are completely alien. It’s very...” He frowns, grasping for the word. “Unsettling. I like control, Ana, and around you, that just”—he stands, his gaze intense—“evaporates.” He waves his hand vaguely, then runs it through his hair and takes a deep breath. He clasps my hand. “Come, we need to talk. And you need to eat.”

CHAPTER TWO

He whisks me into a small, intimate restaurant. “This place will have to do,” Christian grumbles. “We don’t have much time.”

The restaurant looks fine to me. Wooden chairs, linen tablecloths, white candles, small vases of white roses, and walls the same color as Christian’s playroom—deep bloodred—with randomly placed small gilt mirrors. Ella Fitzgerald croons softly in the background about this thing called love. It’s very romantic.

The waiter leads us to a table for two in a small alcove, and I take a seat, apprehensive about what he’s going to say.

“We don’t have long,” Christian says to the waiter as we sit. “So we’ll each have sirloin steak cooked medium, béarnaise sauce if you have it, fries, and green vegetables, whatever the chef has—and bring me the wine list.”

“Certainly, sir.” The waiter, taken aback by Christian’s cool, calm efficiency, scuttles off.

Christian places his BlackBerry on the table. *Jeez, don’t I get a choice?*

“And if I don’t like steak?”

He sighs. “Don’t start, Anastasia.”

“I am not a child, Christian.”

“Well, stop acting like one.”

It’s as if he’s slapped me. So this is how it will be, an agitated, fraught conversation, albeit in a romantic setting, but certainly no hearts and flowers.

“I’m a child because I don’t like steak?” I mutter, trying to conceal my hurt.

“For deliberately making me jealous. It’s a childish thing to do. Have you no regard for your friend’s feelings, leading him on like that?”

Christian presses his lips together in a thin line as the waiter returns with the wine list.

I hadn't thought of that. Poor José. I certainly don't want to encourage him. Suddenly I'm mortified. Christian has a point; it was a thoughtless thing to do.

He glances at the wine list. "Would you like to choose the wine?" he asks, raising his eyebrows, arrogance personified. He knows I know nothing about wine.

"You choose," I answer, sullen but chastened.

"Two glasses of the Barossa Valley Shiraz, please."

"Er, we only sell that wine by the bottle, sir."

"A bottle, then," Christian snaps.

"Sir." He retreats, subdued, and I don't blame him.

I frown at Fifty. What's eating him? Me probably, and somewhere in the depths of my psyche, my inner goddess rises sleepily, stretches, and smiles. She's been asleep for a while. "You're very grumpy."

He gazes at me impassively. "I wonder why that is?"

"Well, it's good to set the right tone for an intimate and honest discussion about the future, wouldn't you say?" I smile at him sweetly.

His mouth presses into a hard line once more, but then, almost reluctantly, his lips lift, and I know he's trying to stifle his smile. "I'm sorry," he says.

"Apology accepted. And I'm pleased to inform you I haven't decided to become a vegetarian since we last ate."

"Since that *was* the last time you ate, I think that's a moot point."

"There's that word again, 'moot.'"

"Moot," he mouths, and his eyes soften with humor. He runs his hand through his hair, and he's serious again. "Ana, the last time we spoke, you left me. I'm a little nervous. I've told you I want you back, and you've said...nothing." His gaze is intense and expectant while his candor is totally disarming. What the hell do I say to this?

"I've missed you...really missed you, Christian. The past few days have been...difficult." I swallow, and a lump in my throat swells as I recall the desperate anguish I've felt since I left him. This last week has been the worst in my life, the pain almost indescribable. Nothing has come close. But reality hits home, winding me. "Nothing's changed. I

can't be what you want me to be." I squeeze the words out past the lump in my throat.

"You are what I want you to be." He's emphatic.

"No, Christian, I'm not."

"You're upset because of what happened last time. I behaved stupidly, and you—so did you. Why didn't you safe-word, Anastasia?" His tone changes, becoming accusatory.

What? Whoa, change of direction.

"Answer me."

"I don't know. I was overwhelmed. I was trying to be what you wanted me to be, trying to deal with the pain, and it went out of my mind. You know... I forgot," I whisper and I shrug apologetically.

Perhaps we could have avoided all this heartache.

"You forgot!" he exclaims in horror, grabbing the sides of the table.

I wither under his glare. *Shit!* He's furious again. My inner goddess glares at me, too. *See, you brought all this on yourself!*

"How can I trust you?" His voice is low. "Ever?"

The waiter arrives with our wine as we sit staring at each other, blue eyes to gray. Both of us reeling with unspoken recriminations, while the waiter removes the cork with an unnecessary flourish and then pours a little wine into Christian's glass.

Christian automatically reaches out and takes a sip. "That's fine." His tone is curt.

The waiter gingerly fills our glasses, placing the bottle on the table before beating a hasty retreat.

Christian has not taken his eyes off me the whole time. I'm the first to crack, breaking eye contact, picking up my glass, and taking a large gulp. I barely taste it.

"I'm sorry," I whisper, suddenly feeling stupid and ashamed. I left because I thought we were incompatible, but he's saying I could have stopped him?

"Sorry for what?" he says, alarmed.

"Not using the safe word."

He closes his eyes, as if in relief. "We might have avoided all this suffering."

“You look fine.” More than fine. You look like you.

“Appearances can be deceptive,” he mutters. “I’m not fine. I feel like the sun has set and not risen for five days, Ana. I’m in perpetual night here.”

I’m winded by his admission. *Oh my, like me.*

“You said you’d never leave, yet the going gets tough and you’re out the door.”

“When did I say I’d never leave?”

“In your sleep. It was the most comforting thing I’d heard in so long, Anastasia. It made me relax.”

My heart constricts and I reach for my wine.

“You said you loved me,” he whispers. “Is that now in the past tense?” His voice is low, laced with anxiety.

“No, Christian, it’s not.”

He looks so vulnerable as he exhales. “Good,” he murmurs.

I’m shocked by his admission. He’s had a change of heart. When I told him I loved him before, he was horrified.

The waiter is back. Briskly he places our plates in front of us and scuttles away.

Holy hell. Food.

“Eat,” Christian demands.

Deep down I know I’m hungry, but right now, my stomach is in knots. Sitting across from the only man I’ve ever loved and debating our uncertain future does not promote a healthy appetite. I look dubiously at my food.

“So help me God, Anastasia, if you don’t eat, I will take you across my knee here in this restaurant. And it will have nothing to do with my sexual gratification. Eat!”

Keep your hair on, Grey. My subconscious stares at me over her half-moon specs. She is wholeheartedly in agreement with Fifty Shades.

“Okay, I’ll eat. Stow your twitching palm, please.”

He doesn’t smile but continues to glare at me. Reluctantly, I lift my knife and fork, slice into my steak, and pop a piece into my mouth. Oh, it’s mouthwateringly good. I’m hungry, really hungry. I chew and he visibly relaxes.

We eat our supper in silence. The music’s changed. A soft-voiced

woman sings in the background, her lyrics echoing my thoughts. I'll never be the same since he came into my life.

I glance at Fifty. He's eating and watching me. Hunger, longing, anxiety combined in one hot look.

"Do you know who's singing?" I try for some normal conversation. Christian pauses and listens. "No...but she's good, whoever she is."
"I like her, too."

Finally, he smiles his private enigmatic smile. What's he planning?
"What?" I ask.

He shakes his head. "Eat up," he says mildly.

I have eaten half the food on my plate. I've reached my limit. How can I negotiate this?

"I can't manage any more. Have I eaten enough for Sir?"

He stares at me impassively, not answering, then glances at his watch.

"I'm really full," I add, taking a sip of the delicious wine.

"We have to go shortly. Taylor's here, and you have to be up for work in the morning."

"So do you."

"I function on a lot less sleep than you do, Anastasia. At least you've eaten something."

"Aren't we going back via *Charlie Tango*?"

"No, I thought I might have a drink—Taylor will pick us up. Besides, this way I have you in the car all to myself—for a few hours, at least. What can we do but talk?"

Oh, that's his plan.

Christian summons the waiter to ask for the check, then picks up his BlackBerry and makes a call. "We're at Le Picotin, Southwest Third Avenue." He hangs up. He's still curt over the phone.

"You're very brusque with Taylor... In fact, with most people."

"I just get to the point quickly, Anastasia."

"You haven't gotten to the point this evening. Nothing's changed, Christian."

"I have a proposition for you."

"This started with a proposition."

"A different proposition."

The waiter returns, and Christian hands over his credit card without checking the bill. He gazes at me speculatively while the waiter swipes his card. Christian's phone buzzes once, and he peers at it.

He has a proposition? What now? A couple of scenarios run through my mind: kidnapping, working for him. No, nothing makes sense.

Christian finishes paying. "Come. Taylor's outside."

We stand and he takes my hand.

"I don't want to lose you, Anastasia." He kisses my knuckles tenderly, and the touch of his lips on my skin resonates through my body.

The Audi is waiting outside. Christian opens my door. Climbing in, I sink into the plush leather. He heads to the driver's side; Taylor steps out of the car and they talk briefly. This isn't their usual protocol. I'm curious. What are they talking about? Moments later, they're both back in the car, and I glance at Christian, who's wearing his impassive face as he stares ahead.

I allow myself a brief moment to examine his profile: straight nose, sculpted full lips, hair falling deliciously over his forehead. This divine man is surely not meant for me.

Soft music fills the rear of the car, a grand orchestral piece that I don't know, and Taylor pulls into the light traffic, heading for I-5 and Seattle.

Christian shifts to face me. "As I was saying, Anastasia, I have a proposition for you."

I glance nervously at Taylor.

"Taylor can't hear you," Christian reassures me.

"What?"

"Taylor," Christian calls. Taylor doesn't respond. He calls again, still no response. Christian leans over and taps his shoulder.

Taylor removes an earbud I hadn't noticed. "Yes, sir?"

"Thank you, Taylor. It's okay—resume your listening."

"Sir."

"Happy now? He's listening to his iPod. Puccini. Forget he's here. I do."

"Did you deliberately ask him to do that?"

"Yes."

Oh. "Okay...your proposition?"

Christian looks suddenly determined and businesslike. *Holy shit.* We're negotiating a deal. I listen attentively.

"Let me ask you something first. Do you want a regular vanilla relationship, with no kinky fuckery at all?"

My mouth drops open. "Kinky fuckery?" I squeak.

"Kinky fuckery."

"I can't believe you said that."

"Well, I did. Answer me."

My inner goddess is down on bended knee with her hands clasped in supplication, begging me.

"I like your kinky fuckery," I whisper.

"That's what I thought. So what don't you like?"

Not being able to touch you. You enjoying my pain, the bite of the belt...

"The threat of cruel and unusual punishment."

"What does that mean?"

"Well, you have all those"—I glance at Taylor and lower my voice—"things in your playroom, the canes and whips, and they frighten the living daylights out of me. I don't want you to use them on me."

"Okay, so no whips or canes. Or belts, for that matter."

I'm puzzled. "Are you attempting to redefine the hard limits?"

"Not as such. I'm just trying to understand you—get a clearer picture of what you do and don't like."

"Fundamentally, Christian, it's your joy in inflicting pain that's difficult for me to handle. And the idea that you'll do it because I have crossed some arbitrary line."

"But it's not arbitrary—the rules are written down."

"I don't want a set of rules."

"None at all?"

"No rules." I shake my head, but my heart is in my mouth. Where is he going with this?

"But you don't mind if I spank you?"

"Spank me with what?"

"This." He holds up his hand.

I squirm uncomfortably. "No, not really. Especially with those silver

balls..." Thank heavens it's dark; my face is burning and my voice trails off as I recall that night. *Yeah...I'd do that again.*

"Yes, that was fun."

"More than fun," I agree.

"So you can deal with some pain."

I shrug. "Yes, I suppose." Oh, where is he going with this? My anxiety level has shot up several magnitudes on the Richter scale.

He strokes his chin, deep in thought. "Anastasia, I want to start again. Do the vanilla thing and then maybe, once you trust me more—and I trust you to be honest and to communicate with me—we could move on and do some of the things that I like to do."

Holy crap. I stare at him, stunned, with no thoughts in my head at all.

I think he's anxious, but I can't see him clearly, as we're shrouded in the Oregon darkness. And suddenly, I realize what he's asking. He's striving for the light...but can I ask him to do this? Don't I like the dark? Some dark, certainly. Memories of the Thomas Tallis night come to mind. *Yes. I'd do that again.*

"But what about punishments?" I ask.

"No punishments." He shakes his head. "None."

"And the rules?"

"No rules."

"None at all? But you have needs..."

"I need *you* more, Anastasia. These last few days have been hell. All my instincts tell me to let you go, tell me I don't deserve you. Those photos the boy took—I see how he sees you. You look untroubled and beautiful, not that you're not beautiful now, but here you sit. I see your pain. It's so hard knowing I'm the one who has made you feel this way. But I'm a selfish man. I've wanted you since you fell into my office. You are exquisite, honest, warm, strong, witty, beguilingly innocent; the list is endless. I am in awe of you. I want you, and the thought of anyone else having you is like a knife twisting in my dark soul."

My mouth goes dry. *Holy shit.* If that isn't a declaration of love, I don't know what is. And the words tumble out of me—a dam breached.

"Christian, why do you think you have a dark soul? I would never say that. Sad maybe, but you're a good man. I can see that—you're

generous, you're kind, and you've never lied to me. And I haven't tried very hard. Last Saturday was such a shock to my system. It was my wake-up call. I realized that you'd been easy on me and that I couldn't be the person you wanted me to be. Then, after I left, it dawned on me that the physical pain you inflicted was not as bad as the pain of losing you. I do want to please you, but it's hard."

"You please me all the time," he whispers. "How often do I have to tell you that?"

"I never know what you're thinking. Sometimes you're so closed off, like an island state. You intimidate me. That's why I keep quiet. I don't know which way your mood is going to go. It swings from north to south and back again in a nanosecond. It's confusing and you won't let me touch you and I want so much to show you how much I love you."

He blinks in the darkness, warily I think, and I can resist him no longer. I unbuckle my seat belt and scramble into his lap, taking him by surprise, and take his head in my hands.

"I love you, Christian Grey. And you're prepared to do all this for me. I'm the one who's undeserving. And I'm just sorry that I can't do all those things for you. Maybe with time—I don't know—but yes, I accept your proposition. Where do I sign?"

He snakes his arms around me and crushes me to him. "Oh, Ana," he breathes as he buries his nose in my hair.

We sit with our arms wrapped around each other, listening to the music—a soothing piano piece—mirroring the emotions in the car, the sweet tranquil calm after the storm. I snuggle into his arms, resting my head in the crook of his neck.

He gently strokes my back. "Touching is a hard limit for me, Anastasia."

"I know. I wish I understood why."

After a while, he sighs, and in a soft voice, he says, "I had a horrific childhood. One of the crack whore's pimps..." His voice trails off, and his body tenses as he recalls some unimaginable horror. "I remember that," he whispers, shuddering.

My heart constricts as I recall the burn scars marring his skin. *Oh, Christian.* I tighten my arms around his neck. "Was she abusive? Your mother?" My voice is strained with unshed tears.

“Not that I remember. She was neglectful. She didn’t protect me from her pimp.” He snorts. “I think it was me who looked after her. When she finally killed herself, it took four days for someone to raise the alarm and find us. I remember that.”

I cannot contain my gasp of horror. *Holy mother fuck.* Bile rises in my throat. “That’s pretty fucked-up.”

“Fifty shades,” he murmurs.

I press my lips against his neck, seeking and offering solace as I imagine a small, dirty, gray-eyed boy lost and lonely beside the body of his dead mother.

Christian... I breathe in his scent. He smells heavenly, my favorite fragrance in the entire world. He tightens his arms around me and kisses my hair, and I sit wrapped in his embrace as Taylor speeds into the night.

WHEN I WAKE, WE’RE driving through Seattle.

“Hey,” Christian says softly.

“Sorry,” I murmur as I sit up and stretch. I’m still in his arms, on his lap.

“I could watch you sleep forever, Ana.”

“Did I say anything?”

“No. We’re nearly at your place.”

Oh? “We’re not going to yours?”

“No.”

I sit up and gaze at him. “Why not?”

“Because you have work tomorrow.”

“Oh.” I pout.

“Why, did you have something in mind?”

I squirm. “Well, maybe.”

He chuckles. “Anastasia, I am not going to touch you again, not until you beg me to.”

“What!”

“So that you’ll start communicating with me. Next time we make love, you’re going to have to tell me exactly what you want in fine detail.”

“Oh.”

He shifts me off his lap as Taylor pulls up outside my apartment. Christian climbs out and holds the car door open for me. “I have

something for you.” He moves to the back of the car, opens the trunk, and pulls out a large gift-wrapped box.

What the hell is this? It’s heavy.

“Open it when you get inside.”

“You’re not coming in?”

“No, Anastasia.”

“So when will I see you?”

“Tomorrow?”

“My boss wants me to go for a drink with him tomorrow.”

Christian’s face hardens. “Does he, now?” He sounds menacing.

“To celebrate my first week,” I add quickly.

“Where?”

“I don’t know.”

“I could pick you up from there.”

“Okay. I’ll email or text you.”

“Good.”

He walks me to the lobby door and waits while I dig my keys out of my purse. As I unlock the door, he leans forward and cups my chin, tilting my head back. His mouth hovers over mine, and closing his eyes, he runs a trail of kisses from the corner of my eye to the corner of my mouth.

A small moan escapes my mouth as my insides melt and unfurl.

“Until tomorrow,” he breathes.

“Good night, Christian.” I hear the need in my voice.

He smiles. “In you go,” he says, and I walk into the lobby carrying my mysterious parcel. “Later, baby,” he calls, then turns and, with his easy grace, heads back to the car.

Once in the apartment, I open the gift box and find my MacBook Pro, the BlackBerry, and another rectangular box. What is this? I unwrap the silver paper. Inside is a black slim leather case.

Opening the case, I find an iPad. *Holy shit...an iPad.* A white card is resting on the screen with a message written in Christian’s handwriting:

*Anastasia—this is for you.
I know what you want to hear.
The music on here says it for me.
Christian*

I have a Christian Grey mix tape in the guise of a high-end iPad. I shake my head in disapproval because of the expense, but deep down I love it. Jack has one at the office, so I know how they work.

I switch it on and gasp as the wallpaper image appears: a small model glider. It's the Blaník L-23 I gave him, mounted on a glass stand and sitting on what I think is Christian's desk at his office.

He built it! He really did build it. I remember now he mentioned it in the note with the flowers. I'm reeling, and I know in that instant that he's put a great deal of thought into this gift.

I slide the arrow at the bottom of the screen to unlock it and gasp again. The background photograph is of Christian and me at my graduation—the one that appeared in *The Seattle Times*. Christian looks so handsome and I can't help my face-splitting grin. *Yes, and he's mine!*

With a swipe of my finger, the icons shift, and several new ones appear on the next screen. A Kindle app, iBooks, Words—whatever that is.

The British Library? I touch the icon and a menu appears: HISTORICAL COLLECTION. Scrolling down, I select NOVELS OF THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURY. Another menu. I tap on a title: *THE AMERICAN* BY HENRY JAMES. A new window opens, offering me a scanned copy of the book to read. Holy crap—it's an early edition, published in 1879, and it's on my iPad! He's bought me the British Library at a touch of a button.

I exit quickly, knowing I could be lost in this app for an eternity. I notice a "good food" app that makes me roll my eyes and smile at the same time, a news app, a weather app, but his note mentioned music. I go back to the main screen, hit the iPod icon, and a playlist appears. I scroll through the songs, and the list makes me smile. Thomas Tallis—I'm not going to forget that in a hurry. I heard it twice, after all, while he flogged and fucked me.

"Witchcraft." My grin gets wider. Dancing around the great room. The Bach Marcelllo piece. *Oh no, that's way too sad for my mood right now.* Jeff Buckley. *Yeah, I've heard of him.* Snow Patrol—my favorite band—and a song called "Principles of Lust" by Enigma. How Christian. Another called "Possession"... *Oh yes, very Fifty Shades.* José González's "Heartbeats"...and a few more I've never heard.

Selecting a song that catches my eye, I press play. It's called "Try"

by Nelly Furtado. She starts to sing, and her voice is a silken scarf that wraps around me like a cocoon. I lie down on my bed.

Does this mean Christian's going to try? Try this new relationship? I drink in the lyrics, staring at the ceiling, trying to understand his turn-around. He missed me. I missed him. He must have some feelings for me. He must. This iPad, these songs, these apps—he cares. He really cares. My heart swells with hope.

The song ends and tears spring to my eyes. I quickly scroll to another—"The Scientist" by Coldplay, one of Kate's favorite bands. I know the track, but I've never really listened to the lyrics before. I close my eyes and let the words wash through me.

My tears start to flow. I can't stem them. If this isn't an apology, what is it? *Oh, Christian.*

Or is this an invitation? Will he answer my questions? *Am I reading too much into this? I am probably reading too much into this.*

I dash my tears away. I have to email him to thank him. I leap off my bed to fetch the mean machine.

Coldplay continues as I sit cross-legged on my bed. The Mac powers up and I log in.

From: Anastasia Steele

Subject: iPad

Date: June 9 2011 23:56

To: Christian Grey

You've made me cry again.

I love the iPad.

I love the songs.

I love the British Library app.

I love you.

Thank you.

Good night.

Ana xx

From: Christian Grey
Subject: iPad
Date: June 10 2011 00:03
To: Anastasia Steele

I'm glad you like it. I bought one for myself.

Now, if I were there, I would kiss away your tears.

But I'm not—so go to sleep.

Christian Grey
CEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings, Inc.

His response makes me smile—still so bossy, still so Christian. Will that change, too?... I hope not. I like him like this—commanding—as long as I can stand up to him without fear of punishment.

From: Anastasia Steele
Subject: Mr. Grumpy
Date: June 10 2011 00:07
To: Christian Grey

You sound your usual bossy and possibly tense, possibly grumpy self, Mr. Grey.

I know something that could ease that. But then, you're not here—you wouldn't let me stay, and you expect me to beg...

Dream on, Sir.

Ana xx

PS: I also note that you included the Stalker's Anthem, "Every Breath You Take." I do enjoy your sense of humor, but does Dr. Flynn know?

From: Christian Grey
Subject: Zen-Like Calm
Date: June 10 2011 00:10
To: Anastasia Steele

My Dearest Miss Steele

Spanking occurs in vanilla relationships, too, you know. Usually consensually and in a sexual context...but I am more than happy to make an exception.

You'll be relieved to know that Dr. Flynn also enjoys my sense of humor.

Now, please go to sleep, as you won't get much tomorrow.

Incidentally—you will beg, trust me. And I look forward to it.

Christian Grey
Tense CEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings, Inc.

From: Anastasia Steele
Subject: Good Night, Sweet Dreams
Date: June 10 2011 00:12
To: Christian Grey

Well, since you ask so nicely, and I like your delicious threat, I shall curl up with the iPad that you have so kindly given me and fall asleep browsing in the British Library, listening to the music that says it for you.

A xxx

From: Christian Grey
Subject: One more request
Date: June 10 2011 00:15
To: Anastasia Steele

Dream of me.

x

Christian Grey
CEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings, Inc.

Dream of you, Christian Grey? Always.

CHAPTER THREE

The one good thing about being carless is that on the bus on my way to work, I can plug my headphones into my iPad while it's safely in my purse and listen to all the wonderful tunes Christian has given me. By the time I arrive at the office, I have the most ludicrous grin on my face.

Jack glances up and does a double take.

"Good morning, Ana. You look...radiant."

His remark flusters me. *How inappropriate!* "I slept well. Thank you, Jack. Good morning."

His brow crinkles. "Can you read these for me and have reports on them by lunchtime, please?" He hands me four manuscripts. At my horrified expression, he adds, "Just first chapters."

"Sure." I smile with relief, and he gives me a broad smile in return.

I switch on the computer to start work, finishing my latte and eating a banana. There's an email from Christian.

From: Christian Grey

Subject: So Help Me...

Date: June 10 2011 08:05

To: Anastasia Steele

I do hope you've had breakfast.

I missed you last night.

Christian Grey

CEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings, Inc.

From: Anastasia Steele
Subject: Old books...
Date: June 10 2011 08:33
To: Christian Grey

I am eating a banana as I type. I have not had breakfast for several days, so it is a step forward. I love the British Library app—I started rereading *Robinson Crusoe*...and of course, I love you.

Now leave me alone—I am trying to work.

Anastasia Steele
Assistant to Jack Hyde, Editor, SIP

From: Christian Grey
Subject: Is that all you've eaten?
Date: June 10 2011 08:36
To: Anastasia Steele

You can do better than that. You're going to need your energy for begging.

Christian Grey
CEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings, Inc.

From: Anastasia Steele
Subject: Pest
Date: June 10 2011 08:39
To: Christian Grey

Mr. Grey—I am trying to work for a living—and it's you who will be begging.

Anastasia Steele
Assistant to Jack Hyde, Editor, SIP

From: Christian Grey
Subject: Bring It On!
Date: June 10 2011 08:42
To: Anastasia Steele

Why, Miss Steele, I love a challenge...

Christian Grey
CEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings, Inc.

I'm grinning at the screen like an idiot. But I need to read these chapters for Jack and write reports on all of them. Placing the manuscripts on my desk, I begin.

At lunchtime, I head to the deli for a pastrami sandwich and listen to the playlist on my iPad. First up there's Nitin Sawhney, some world music called "Homelands"—it's good. Mr. Grey has eclectic taste in music. I wander back listening to a classical piece, *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* by Ralph Vaughn Williams. Oh, Fifty has a sense of humor, and I love him for it. Will this stupid grin ever leave my face?

The afternoon drags. I decide, in an unguarded moment, to email Christian.

From: Anastasia Steele
Subject: Bored...
Date: June 10 2011 16:05
To: Christian Grey

Twiddling my thumbs.

How are you?

What are you doing?

Anastasia Steele
Assistant to Jack Hyde, Editor, SIP

From: Christian Grey
Subject: Your thumbs
Date: June 10 2011 16:15
To: Anastasia Steele

You should have come to work for me.

You wouldn't be twiddling your thumbs.

I am sure I could put them to better use.

In fact, I can think of a number of options...

I am doing the usual humdrum mergers and acquisitions.

It's all very dry.

Your emails at SIP are monitored.

Christian Grey
Distracted CEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings, Inc.

Oh shit. I had no idea. How the hell does he know? I scowl at the screen and quickly check the emails we've sent, deleting them as I do.

Promptly at five thirty, Jack is at my desk. It's Casual Friday, so he's wearing jeans and a black shirt.

"Drink, Ana? We usually like to go for a quick one at the bar across the street."

"We?" I ask, hopeful.

"Yeah, most of us go. You coming?"

For some unknown reason, which I don't want to examine too closely, I'm relieved that I won't be on my own with him.

"I'd love to. What's the bar called?"

"Fifty's."

"You're kidding."

He looks at me oddly. "No. Some significance for you?"

"No, sorry. I'll join you over there."

"What would you like to drink?"

"A beer, please."

"Cool."

I make my way to the powder room and email Christian from the BlackBerry.

From: Anastasia Steele
Subject: You'll Fit Right In
Date: June 10 2011 17:36
To: Christian Grey

We are going to a bar called Fifty's.

The rich seam of humor that I could mine from this is endless.

I look forward to seeing you there, Mr. Grey.

A. x

From: Christian Grey
Subject: Hazards
Date: June 10 2011 17:38
To: Anastasia Steele

Mining is a very, very dangerous occupation.

Christian Grey
CEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings, Inc.

From: Anastasia Steele
Subject: Hazards?
Date: June 10 2011 17:40
To: Christian Grey

And your point is?

From: Christian Grey
Subject: Merely...
Date: June 10 2011 17:42
To: Anastasia Steele

Making an observation, Miss Steele.

I'll see you shortly.

Sooners rather than laters, baby.

Christian Grey
CEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings, Inc.

I check myself in the mirror. What a difference a day can make. I have more color in my cheeks, and my eyes are shining. It's the Christian Grey effect. A little email sparring will do that to a girl. I grin at the mirror and straighten my pale-blue shirt—the one Taylor bought me. I am wearing my favorite jeans today, too. Most of the women in the office wear either jeans or floaty skirts. I will need to invest in a floaty skirt or two. Perhaps I'll do that this weekend and bank the check Christian gave me for Wanda, my Beetle.

As I head out of the building, I hear my name called.
“Miss Steele?”

I turn expectantly, and an ashen young woman approaches me. She looks like a ghost—so pale and strangely blank.

“Miss Anastasia Steele?” she repeats, and her features stay static even though she’s speaking.

“Yes?”

She stops, staring at me from about three feet away on the sidewalk, and I stare back, immobilized. Who is she? What does she want? How does she know my name?

“Can I help you?” I ask.

“No... I just wanted to look at you.” Her voice is eerily soft. Like me, she has dark hair that starkly contrasts with her fair skin. Her eyes are brown, like bourbon, but flat. There’s no life in them at all. Her beautiful face is pale and etched with sorrow.

“Sorry—you have me at a disadvantage,” I say, trying to ignore the warning tingle up my spine. On closer inspection, she looks odd, disheveled and uncared for. Her clothes are two sizes too big, including her designer trench coat.

She laughs, a strange, discordant sound that only feeds my anxiety. “What do you have that I don’t?” she asks sadly.

My anxiety turns to fear. “I’m sorry. Who are you?”

“Me? I’m nobody.” She lifts her arm to drag her hand through her shoulder-length hair, and as she does, the sleeve of her trench coat rides up, revealing a soiled bandage around her wrist.

Holy fuck.

“Good day, Miss Steele.” Turning, she walks up the street as I stand rooted to the spot. I watch as her slight frame disappears from view, lost among the workers pouring out of their various offices.

What was that about?

Confused, I cross the street to the bar, trying to assimilate what just happened, while my subconscious rears her ugly head and hisses at me. *She has something to do with Christian.*

Fifty’s is a cavernous, impersonal bar with baseball pennants and posters hanging on the wall. Jack is at the bar with Elizabeth; Courtney, the other editor; two guys from Finance; and Claire from Reception. She is wearing her trademark silver hoop earrings.

“Hi, Ana!” Jack hands me a bottle of Bud.