

A close-up, high-contrast photograph of a woman's eye. The eye is light blue-green with a dark pupil. The surrounding skin is pale and the lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of the eyelashes and the skin.

**GREY**

**E L JAMES**

FIFTY SHADES OF GREY AS TOLD BY CHRISTIAN

**BOOKS BY E L JAMES**

*Fifty Shades of Grey*

*Fifty Shades Darker*

*Fifty Shades Freed*

*Grey*

# GREY

---

E L James



*Vintage Books*

*A Division of Penguin Random House LLC | New York*

FIRST VINTAGE BOOKS EDITION, JUNE 2015

Copyright © 2011, 2015 by Fifty Shades Ltd.

All rights reserved. Published in the United States by Vintage Books, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York, and distributed in Canada by Penguin Random House of Canada Limited, Toronto.

Vintage and colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Portions of this book, including significant parts of the dialogue and e-mail exchanges, have previously appeared in the author's prior works.

**ISBN: 9781101946343**

**eBook ISBN: 9781101946350**

*Book design by Claudia Martinez*

*Cover design by Sqicedragon and Megan Wilson*

[www.vintagebooks.com](http://www.vintagebooks.com)

v4.1\_r4

prh

*This book is dedicated to those readers who asked...  
and asked...and asked...and asked for this.*

*Thank you for all that you've done for me.*

*You rock my world every day.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

---

Thanks to:

Anne Messitte for her guidance, good humor, and belief in me. For her generosity with her time and for her unstinting effort to untangle my prose, I am forever indebted.

Tony Chirico and Russell Perreault for always looking out for me, and the fabulous production editorial and design team who saw this book across the finish line: Amy Brosey, Lydia Buechler, Katherine Hourigan, Andy Hughes, Claudia Martinez, and Megan Wilson.

Niall Leonard for his love, support, and guidance, and for being the only man who can really, really make me laugh.

Valerie Hoskins, my agent, without whom I'd still be working in TV. Thank you for everything.

Kathleen Blandino, Ruth Clampett, and Belinda Willis: thanks for the pre-read.

The Lost Girls for their precious friendship and the therapy.

The Bunker Babes for their constant wit, wisdom, support, and friendship.

The FP ladies for help with my Americanisms.

Peter Branston for his help with SFBT.

Brian Brunetti for his guidance in flying a helicopter.

Professor Dawn Carusi for help in navigating the U.S. higher education system.

Professor Chris Collins for an education in soil science.

Dr. Raina Sluder for her insights into behavioral health.

And last but by no means least, my children. I love you more than words can ever say. You bring such joy to my life and to those around you. You are beautiful, funny, bright, compassionate young men, and I could not be more proud of you.

## CONTENTS

---

*Cover*

*Other Titles*

*Title Page*

*Copyright*

*Dedication*

*Acknowledgments*

Monday, May 9, 2011

Saturday, May 14, 2011

Sunday, May 15, 2011

Thursday, May 19, 2011

Friday, May 20, 2011

Saturday, May 21, 2011

Sunday, May 22, 2011

Monday, May 23, 2011

Tuesday, May 24, 2011

Wednesday, May 25, 2011

Thursday, May 26, 2011

Friday, May 27, 2011

Saturday, May 28, 2011

Sunday, May 29, 2011

Monday, May 30, 2011

Tuesday, May 31, 2011

Wednesday, June 1, 2011

Thursday, June 2, 2011

Friday, June 3, 2011

Saturday, June 4, 2011

Sunday, June 5, 2011

Monday, June 6, 2011

Tuesday, June 7, 2011

Wednesday, June 8, 2011

Thursday, June 9, 2011

*About the Author*



**MONDAY, MAY 9, 2011**

---

I have three cars. They go fast across the floor. So fast. One is red. One is green. One is yellow. I like the green one. It's the best. Mommy likes them, too. I like when Mommy plays with the cars and me. The red is her best. Today she sits on the couch staring at the wall. The green car flies into the rug. The red car follows. Then the yellow. Crash! But Mommy doesn't see. I do it again. Crash! But Mommy doesn't see. I aim the green car at her feet. But the green car goes under the couch. I can't reach it. My hand is too big for the gap. Mommy doesn't see. I want my green car. But Mommy stays on the couch staring at the wall. *Mommy. My car.* She doesn't hear me. *Mommy.* I pull her hand and she lies back and closes her eyes. *Not now, Maggot. Not now,* she says. My green car stays under the couch. It's always under the couch. I can see it. But I can't reach it. My green car is fuzzy. Covered in gray fur and dirt. I want it back. But I can't reach it. I can never reach it. My green car is lost. Lost. And I can never play with it again.

I open my eyes and my dream fades in the early-morning light. *What the hell was that about?* I grasp at the fragments as they recede, but fail to catch any of them.

Dismissing it, like I do most mornings, I climb out of bed and find some newly laundered sweats in my walk-in closet. Outside, a leaden sky promises rain, and I'm not in the mood to be rained on during my run today. I head upstairs to my gym, switch on the TV for the morning business news, and step onto the treadmill.

My thoughts stray to the day. I've nothing but meetings, though I'm

seeing my personal trainer later for a workout at my office—Bastille is always a welcome challenge.

*Maybe I should call Elena?*

*Yeah. Maybe.* We can do dinner later this week.

I stop the treadmill, breathless, and head down to the shower to start another monotonous day.

**“TOMORROW,” I MUTTER, DISMISSING** Claude Bastille as he stands at the threshold of my office.

“Golf, this week, Grey.” Bastille grins with easy arrogance, knowing that his victory on the golf course is assured.

I scowl at him as he turns and leaves. His parting words rub salt into my wounds because, despite my heroic attempts during our workout today, my personal trainer has kicked my ass. Bastille is the only one who can beat me, and now he wants another pound of flesh on the golf course. I detest golf, but so much business is done on the fairways, I have to endure his lessons there, too...and though I hate to admit it, playing against Bastille does improve my game.

As I stare out the window at the Seattle skyline, the familiar ennui seeps unwelcome into my consciousness. My mood is as flat and gray as the weather. My days are blending together with no distinction, and I need some kind of diversion. I’ve worked all weekend, and now, in the continued confines of my office, I’m restless. I shouldn’t feel this way, not after several bouts with Bastille. But I do.

I frown. The sobering truth is that the only thing to capture my interest recently has been my decision to send two freighters of cargo to Sudan. This reminds me—Ros is supposed to come back to me with numbers and logistics. *What the hell is keeping her?* I check my schedule and reach for the phone.

*Damn.* I have to endure an interview with the persistent Miss Kavanagh for the WSU student newspaper. *Why the hell did I agree to this?* I loathe interviews—inane questions from ill-informed, envious people intent on

probing my private life. *And she's a student.* The phone buzzes.

"Yes," I snap at Andrea, as if she's to blame. At least I can keep this interview short.

"Miss Anastasia Steele is here to see you, Mr. Grey."

"Steele? I was expecting Katherine Kavanagh."

"It's Miss Anastasia Steele who's here, sir."

I hate the unexpected. "Show her in."

*Well, well...Miss Kavanagh is unavailable.* I know her father, Eamon, the owner of Kavanagh Media. We've done business together, and he seems like a shrewd operator and a rational human being. This interview is a favor to him—one that I mean to cash in on later when it suits me. And I have to admit I was vaguely curious about his daughter, interested to see if the apple has fallen far from the tree.

A commotion at the door brings me to my feet as a whirl of long chestnut hair, pale limbs, and brown boots dives headfirst into my office. Repressing my natural annoyance at such clumsiness, I hurry over to the girl who has landed on her hands and knees on the floor. Claspingslim shoulders, I help her to her feet.

Clear, embarrassed eyes meet mine and halt me in my tracks. They are the most extraordinary color, powder blue, and guileless, and for one awful moment, I think she can see right through me and I'm left...exposed. The thought is unnerving, so I dismiss it immediately.

She has a small, sweet face that is blushing now, an innocent pale rose. I wonder briefly if all her skin is like that—flawless—and what it would look like pink and warmed from the bite of a cane.

*Damn.*

I stop my wayward thoughts, alarmed at their direction. *What the hell are you thinking, Grey?* This girl is much too young. She gapes at me, and I resist rolling my eyes. *Yeah, yeah, baby, it's just a face, and it's only skin deep.* I need to dispel that admiring look from those eyes but let's have some fun in the process!

“Miss Kavanagh. I’m Christian Grey. Are you all right? Would you like to sit?”

There’s that blush again. In command once more, I study her. She’s quite attractive—slight, pale, with a mane of dark hair barely contained by a hair tie.

A brunette.

*Yeah, she’s attractive.* I extend my hand as she stutters the beginning of a mortified apology and places her hand in mine. Her skin is cool and soft, but her handshake surprisingly firm.

“Miss Kavanagh is indisposed, so she sent me. I hope you don’t mind, Mr. Grey.” Her voice is quiet with a hesitant musicality, and she blinks erratically, long lashes fluttering.

Unable to keep the amusement from my voice as I recall her less-than-elegant entrance into my office, I ask who she is.

“Anastasia Steele. I’m studying English literature with Kate, um... Katherine...um...Miss Kavanagh, at WSU Vancouver.”

*A bashful, bookish type, eh?* She looks it: poorly dressed, her slight frame hidden beneath a shapeless sweater, an A-line brown skirt, and utilitarian boots. *Does she have any sense of style at all?* She looks nervously around my office—everywhere but at me, I note, with amused irony.

How can this young woman be a journalist? She doesn’t have an assertive bone in her body. She’s flustered, meek...submissive. Bemused at my inappropriate thoughts, I shake my head and wonder if first impressions are reliable. Muttering some platitude, I ask her to sit, then notice her discerning gaze appraising my office paintings. Before I can stop myself, I find I’m explaining them. “A local artist. Trouton.”

“They’re lovely. Raising the ordinary to extraordinary,” she says dreamily, lost in the exquisite, fine artistry of Trouton’s work. Her profile is delicate—an upturned nose, soft, full lips—and in her words she has captured my sentiments exactly. *Raising the ordinary to extraordinary.* It’s a keen observation. Miss Steele is bright.

I agree and watch, fascinated, as that flush creeps slowly over her skin once more. As I sit down opposite her, I try to bridle my thoughts. She fishes some crumpled sheets of paper and a digital recorder out of her large bag. She's all thumbs, dropping the damned thing twice on my Bauhaus coffee table. It's obvious she's never done this before, but for some reason I can't fathom, I find it amusing. Under normal circumstances her maladroitness would irritate the hell out of me, but now I hide my smile beneath my index finger and resist the urge to set it up for her myself.

As she fumbles and grows more and more flustered, it occurs to me that I could refine her motor skills with the aid of a riding crop. Adeptly used, it can bring even the most skittish to heel. The errant thought makes me shift in my chair. She peeks up at me and bites down on her full bottom lip.

*Fuck! How did I not notice how inviting that mouth is?*

"S-Sorry, I'm not used to this."

*I can tell, baby, but right now I don't give a damn because I can't take my eyes off your mouth.*

"Take all the time you need, Miss Steele." I need another moment to marshal my wayward thoughts.

*Grey...stop this, now.*

"Do you mind if I record your answers?" she asks, her face candid and expectant.

I want to laugh. "After you've taken so much trouble to set up the recorder, you ask me now?"

She blinks, her eyes large and lost for a moment, and I'm overcome by an unfamiliar twinge of guilt.

*Stop being such a shit, Grey.* "No, I don't mind." I don't want to be responsible for that look.

"Did Kate, I mean, Miss Kavanagh, explain what the interview was for?"

"Yes, to appear in the graduation issue of the student newspaper, as I shall be giving the commencement address at this year's graduation

ceremony.” Why the hell I’ve agreed to do *that*, I don’t know. Sam in PR tells me that WSU’s environmental sciences department needs the publicity in order to attract additional funding to match the grant I’ve given them, and Sam will go to any lengths for media exposure.

Miss Steele blinks once more, as if this is news to her—and she looks disapproving. Hasn’t she done any background work for this interview? She should know this. The thought cools my blood. It’s...displeasing, not what I expect from someone who’s imposing on my time.

“Good. I have some questions, Mr. Grey.” She tucks a lock of hair behind her ear, distracting me from my annoyance.

“I thought you might,” I say dryly. Let’s make her squirm. Obliging, she does, then pulls herself upright and squares her small shoulders. She means business. Leaning forward, she presses the start button on the recorder and frowns as she glances down at her crumpled notes.

“You’re very young to have amassed such an empire. To what do you owe your success?”

Surely she can do better than this. What a dull question. Not one iota of originality. It’s disappointing. I trot out my usual response about having exceptional people working for me. People I trust, insofar as I trust anyone, and pay well—blah, blah, blah...But Miss Steele, the simple fact is, I’m brilliant at what I do. For me it’s like falling off a log. Buying ailing, mismanaged companies and fixing them, keeping some or, if they’re really broken, stripping their assets and selling them off to the highest bidder. It’s simply a question of knowing the difference between the two, and invariably it comes down to the people in charge. To succeed in business you need good people, and I can judge a person, better than most.

“Maybe you’re just lucky,” she says quietly.

*Lucky?* A frisson of annoyance runs through me. *Lucky?* How dare she? She looks unassuming and quiet, but this question? No one has ever suggested that I was lucky. Hard work, bringing people with me, keeping a close watch on them, and second-guessing them if I need to, and if they aren’t up to the task, ditching them. *That’s what I do, and I do it well. It’s*

*nothing to do with luck! Well, to hell with that.* Flaunting my erudition, I quote the words of Harvey Firestone, my favorite industrialist. “The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership.”

“You sound like a control freak,” she says, and she’s perfectly serious.

*What the hell?* Maybe she *can* see through me.

*“Control” is my middle name, sweetheart.*

I glare at her, hoping to intimidate her. “Oh, I exercise control in all things, Miss Steele.” And I’d like to exercise it over you, right here, right now.

That attractive blush steals across her face, and she bites that lip again. I ramble on, trying to distract myself from her mouth.

“Besides, immense power is acquired by assuring yourself, in your secret reveries, that you were born to control things.”

“Do you feel that you have immense power?” she asks in a soft, soothing voice, but she arches a delicate brow with a look that conveys her censure. Is she deliberately trying to goad me? Is it her questions, her attitude, or the fact that I find her attractive that’s pissing me off? My annoyance grows.

“I employ over forty thousand people. 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, twenty thousand people would struggle to make their mortgage payments after a month or so.”

Her mouth pops open at my response. That’s more like it. *Suck it up, baby.* I feel my equilibrium returning.

“Don’t you have a board to answer to?”

“I own my company. I don’t have to answer to a board.” She should know this.

“And do you have any interests outside your work?” she continues hastily, correctly gauging my reaction. She knows I’m pissed, and for some inexplicable reason this pleases me.

“I have varied interests, Miss Steele. Very varied.” Images of her in assorted positions in my playroom flash through my mind: shackled on the cross, spread-eagled on the four-poster, splayed over the whipping bench. And behold—there’s that blush again. It’s like a defense mechanism.

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

“Chill out?” Those words out of her smart mouth sound odd but amusing. Besides, when do I get time to chill out? She has no idea what I do. But she looks at me again with those ingenuous big eyes, and to my surprise I find myself considering her question. *What do I do to chill out?* Sailing, flying, fucking...testing the limits of attractive brunettes like her, and bringing them to heel...The thought makes me shift in my seat, but I answer her smoothly, omitting a few favorite hobbies.

“You invest in manufacturing. Why, specifically?”

“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?” They transport food around the planet.

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

*Heart? Me? Oh no, baby.*

My heart was savaged beyond recognition a long time ago. “Possibly. Though there are people who’d say I don’t have a heart.”

“Why would they say that?”

“Because they know me well.” I give her a wry smile. In fact, no one knows me that well, except maybe Elena. I wonder what she would make of little Miss Steele here. The girl is a mass of contradictions: shy, awkward, obviously bright, and arousing as hell.

*Yes, okay, I admit it. I find her alluring.*

She recites the next question by rote. “Would your friends say you’re easy to get to know?”

“I’m a very private person. I go a long way to protect my privacy. I don’t often give interviews.” Doing what I do, living the life I’ve chosen, I need my privacy.



“Why did you agree to do this one?”

“Because I’m a benefactor of the university, and for all intents and purposes, I couldn’t get Miss Kavanagh off my back. She badgered and badgered my PR people, and I admire that kind of tenacity.” But I’m glad it’s you who turned up and not her.

“You also invest in farming technologies. Why are you interested in this area?”

“We can’t eat money, Miss Steele, and there are too many people on this planet who don’t have enough food.” I stare at her, poker-faced.

“That sounds very philanthropic. Is that something you feel passionately about? Feeding the world’s poor?” She regards me with a puzzled look, as if I’m a conundrum, but there’s no way I want her seeing into my dark soul. This is not an area open to discussion. *Move it along, Grey.*

“It’s shrewd business,” I mutter, feigning boredom, and I imagine fucking that mouth to distract myself from all thoughts of hunger. Yes, her mouth needs training, and I imagine her on her knees before me. Now, that thought is appealing.

She recites her next question, dragging me away from my fantasy. “Do you have a philosophy? If so, what is it?”

“I don’t have a philosophy as such. Maybe a guiding principle—Carnegie’s: ‘A man who acquires the ability to take full possession of his own mind may take possession of anything else to which he is justly entitled.’ I’m very singular, driven. I like control—of myself and those around me.”

“So you want to possess things?”

*Yes, baby. You, for one.* I frown, startled by the thought.

“I want to deserve to possess them, but yes, bottom line, I do.”

“You sound like the ultimate consumer.” Her voice is tinged with disapproval, pissing me off again.

“I am.”

She sounds like a rich kid who’s had all she ever wanted, but as I take a

closer look at her clothes—she’s dressed in clothes from some cheap store like Old Navy or H&M—I know that isn’t it. She hasn’t grown up in an affluent household.

*I could really take care of you.*

*Where the hell did that thought come from?*

Although, now that I consider it, I do need a new sub. It’s been, what—two months since Susannah? And here I am, salivating over this woman. I try an agreeable smile. Nothing wrong with consumption—after all, it drives what’s left of the American economy.

“You were adopted. How much do you think that’s shaped the way you are?”

What does this have to do with the price of oil? What a ridiculous question. If I’d stayed with the crack whore, I’d probably be dead. I blow her off with a non-answer, trying to keep my voice level, but she pushes me, demanding to know how old I was when I was adopted.

*Shut her down, Grey!*

My tone goes cold. “That’s a matter of public record, Miss Steele.”

She should know this, too. Now she looks contrite as she tucks an escaped strand of hair behind her ear. *Good.*

“You’ve had to sacrifice family life for your work.”

“That’s not a question,” I snap.

She startles, clearly embarrassed, but she has the grace to apologize and she rephrases the question: “Have you had to sacrifice family life for your work?”

What do I want with a family? “I have a family. I have a brother, a sister, and two loving parents. I’m not interested in extending my family beyond that.”

“Are you gay, Mr. Grey?”

*What the hell!*

I cannot believe she’s said that out loud! Ironically, the question even my own family will not ask. How dare she! I have a sudden urge to drag her

out of her seat, bend her over my knee, spank her, and then fuck her over my desk with her hands tied behind her back. That would answer her ridiculous question. I take a deep calming breath. To my vindictive delight, she appears to be mortified by her own question.

“No, Anastasia, I’m not.” I raise my eyebrows, but keep my expression impassive. *Anastasia*. It’s a lovely name. I like the way my tongue rolls around it.

“I apologize. It’s, um...written here.” She’s at it again with the hair behind the ear. Obviously it’s a nervous habit.

*Are these not her questions?* I ask her, and she pales. Damn, she really is attractive, in an understated sort of way.

“Er...no. Kate—Miss Kavanagh—she compiled the questions.”

“Are you colleagues on the student paper?”

“No. She’s my roommate.”

No wonder she’s all over the place. I scratch my chin, debating whether or not to give her a really hard time.

“Did you volunteer to do this interview?” I ask, and I’m rewarded with her submissive look: she’s nervous about my reaction. I like the effect I have on her.

“I was drafted. She’s not well.” Her voice is soft.

“That explains a great deal.”

There’s a knock at the door, and Andrea appears.

“Mr. Grey, forgive me for interrupting, but your next meeting is in two minutes.”

“We’re not finished here, Andrea. Please cancel my next meeting.”

Andrea gapes at me, looking confused. I stare at her. *Out! Now!* I’m busy with little Miss Steele here.

“Very well, Mr. Grey,” she says, recovering quickly, and turning on her heel, she leaves us.

I turn my attention back to the intriguing, frustrating creature on my couch. “Where were we, Miss Steele?”

“Please, don’t let me keep you from anything.”

*Oh no, baby. It’s my turn now.* I want to know if there are any secrets to uncover behind that lovely face.

“I want to know about you. I think that’s only fair.” As I lean back and press my fingers to my lips, her eyes flick to my mouth and she swallows. *Oh yes—the usual effect.* And it is gratifying to know she isn’t completely oblivious of my charms.

“There’s not much to know,” she says, her blush returning.

I’m intimidating her. “What are your plans after you graduate?”

“I haven’t made any plans, Mr. Grey. I just need to get through my final exams.”

“We run an excellent internship program here.”

What possessed me ever to say that? It’s against the rules, Grey. Never fuck the staff...But you’re not fucking this girl.

She looks surprised, and her teeth sink into that lip again. Why is that so arousing?

“Oh. I’ll bear that in mind,” she replies. “Though I’m not sure I’d fit in here.”

“Why do you say that?” I ask. *What’s wrong with my company?*

“It’s obvious, isn’t it?”

“Not to me.” I’m confounded by her response. She’s flustered again as she reaches for the recorder.

*Shit, she’s going.* Mentally I run through my schedule for that afternoon—there is nothing that won’t keep. “Would you like me to show you around?”

“I’m sure you’re far too busy, Mr. Grey, and I do have a long drive.”

“You’re driving back to Vancouver?” I glance out the window. It’s one hell of a drive, and it’s raining. She shouldn’t be driving in this weather, but I can’t forbid her. The thought irritates me. “Well, you’d better drive carefully.” My voice is sterner than I intend. She fumbles with the recorder. She wants out of my office, and to my surprise, I don’t want her to go.

“Did you get everything you need?” I ask in a transparent effort to prolong her stay.

“Yes, sir,” she says quietly. Her response floors me—the way those words sound, coming out of that smart mouth—and briefly I imagine that mouth at my beck and call.

“Thank you for the interview, Mr. Grey.”

“The pleasure’s been all mine,” I respond—truthfully, because I haven’t been this fascinated by anyone for a while. The thought is unsettling. She stands and I extend my hand, eager to touch her.

“Until we meet again, Miss Steele.” My voice is low as she places her hand in mine. Yes, I want to flog and fuck this girl in my playroom. Have her bound and wanting...needing me, trusting me. I swallow.

*It ain’t going to happen, Grey.*

“Mr. Grey.” She nods and withdraws her hand quickly, too quickly.

I can’t let her go like this. It’s obvious she’s desperate to leave. It’s irritating, but inspiration hits me as I open my office door.

“Just ensuring you make it through the door,” I quip.

Her lips form a hard line. “That’s very considerate, Mr. Grey,” she snaps.

Miss Steele bites back! I grin behind her as she exits, and follow her out. Both Andrea and Olivia look up in shock. *Yeah, yeah. I’m just seeing the girl out.*

“Did you have a coat?” I ask.

“A jacket.”

I give Olivia a pointed look and she immediately leaps up to retrieve a navy jacket, passing it to me with her usual simpering expression. Christ, Olivia is annoying—mooning over me all the time.

*Hmm.* The jacket is worn and cheap. Miss Anastasia Steele should be better dressed. I hold it up for her, and as I pull it over her slim shoulders, I touch the skin at the base of her neck. She stills at the contact and pales.

*Yes!* She is affected by me. The knowledge is immensely pleasing.

Strolling over to the elevator, I press the call button while she stands fidgeting beside me.

*Oh, I could stop your fidgeting, baby.*

The doors open and she scurries in, then turns to face me. She's more than attractive. I would go as far as to say she's beautiful.

"Anastasia," I say, in good-bye.

"Christian," she answers, her voice soft. And the elevator doors close, leaving my name hanging in the air between us, sounding odd and unfamiliar, but sexy as hell.

I need to know more about this girl.

"Andrea," I bark as I return to my office. "Get me Welch on the line, now."

As I sit at my desk and wait for the call, I look at the paintings on the wall of my office, and Miss Steele's words drift back to me. "*Raising the ordinary to extraordinary.*" She could so easily have been describing herself.

My phone buzzes. "I have Mr. Welch on the line for you."

"Put him through."

"Yes, sir."

"Welch, I need a background check."