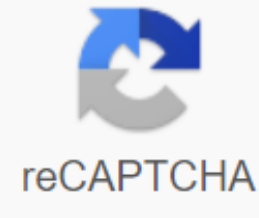




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## Fifty shades darker free reading

Mr Jack Hyde ... he smiles at me, his blue eyes twinkle as he leaned against my table. Good work, Ana. I think we're going to make a great team. Somehow I manage to turn my lips up into the likeness of a smile. I'll leave, if you don't mind, I mutter. See you tomorrow. Good night, Jack. Good night, Ana. As I collect the bag, I shrug my shoulders at the jacket and head to the door. In the early evening air of Seattle, I take a deep breath. It doesn't begin to fill the void in my chest, the emptiness that has been present since Saturday morning, a painful empty reminder of my loss. I go to the bus stop with my head down, looking at my feet and contemplating time without my beloved Wanda, my old beetle... or Audi. I closed the door on this thought immediately. No. Of course, I can afford a car -- a nice, new car. I suspect he was overly generalized in his pay, and the thought leaves a bitter taste in my mouth, but I dismiss it and try to keep my mind as numb and as empty as possible. I don't want to cry again - not on the street. The apartment is empty. I miss Kate and I think she lies on the beach in Barbados sipping a cool cocktail. I turn on the flat screen TV, so there's noise to fill the vacuum and provide some semblance of company, but I don't listen or watch. I'm sitting there staring blankly at the brick wall. I'm numb. I don't feel anything but pain. How long do I have to endure this? The door buzzer startles me from my misery and my heart misses a beat. Who could it be? I click on the intercom. Delivery for Ms. Steele. The dull, disembodied voice answers, and frustration falls through me. I listlessly make my way down and find a young man noisily chewing gum, holding a large cardboard box, and leaning against the front door. I sign the package and take it upstairs. The box is huge and surprisingly light. Inside are two dozen long stems, white roses and cards. Congratulations on your first day at work. I hope it went well. And thank you for the glider. It was very thoughtful. He has pride in the place on my desk. Christian! look at the typewriter card, hollow in my breast enlargement. No doubt his assistant sent this. Christian probably had very little to do with him. It's too painful to think. I inspect the roses - they're beautiful, and I can't bring myself to throw them in the trash. I'm going to go to the kitchen to track down the vase. And so the pattern develops: wake up, work, cry, sleep. Well, try to sleep. I can't even run away from him in my sleep. Grey burning eyes, his lost look, his hair burned and bright all haunt me. And the music... so much music -- I can't hear music. I'm careful to avoid it at all costs. Even the jingles in the commercial make me shudder. I'm with no one. talked, even with my mother or Ray. I Am I have an opportunity for idle conversations now. No, I don't want any of that. I became my island nation. Devastated, war-torn land, where nothing grows and the horizons are gloomy. Yes, it's me. If I talk to my mom, I know I'm going to break even further, and I have nothing to break. It's hard for me to eat. By Wednesday afternoon, I'm managing a cup of yogurt, and that's the first thing I've eaten since Friday. I survive on a newfound tolerance for lattes and diet Coke. It's the caffeine that keeps me going, but it makes me worry. Jack started hovering over me, annoying me by asking me personal questions. What does he want? I'm polite, but I need to keep it at arm's length. I sit and start trawling through a bunch of correspondence addressed to him, and I'm happy with the distraction from men's work. My email is pings and I quickly check out who it is from. Holy crap. A letter from Christian. Oh no, not here... not at work. From: Christian GreySubject: TomorrowDate: June 8, 2011 14:05To: AnastasiaDear AnastasiaForgive is an intrusion on work. I hope everything goes well. Did you get my flowers? I note that tomorrow opens a gallery for your friend's show, and I'm sure you didn't have time to buy a car, and it's a long way off. I would be more than happy to accept you - if you want to. Let me know. Christian GreyCEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings Inc. Tears float in my eyes. I hurriedly leave my desk and bolt to the toilet to escape to one of the stalls. Jose's show. That's bullshit. I forgot about it and promised him I'd go. Hell, Christian is right; How am I going to get there? I'm squeezing my forehead. Why didn't Jose call? Think about it - why didn't anyone call? I was so distracted, I didn't notice that my cell phone was silent. That's bullshit! I'm such an idiot! I still have it on distraction to the BlackBerry. Gosh darn. Christian was getting my calls - unless he just threw the BlackBerry away. How did he get my email address? He knows my shoe size, the email address is unlikely to present him with much trouble. Can I see him again? Can I stand it? Do I want to see him? I close my eyes and tilt my head back like grief and toks a spear through me. Of course I do. Maybe maybe I can tell him that I've changed my mind... No, no, no, I can't be with someone who's happy to hurt me, someone who can't love me. I have painful memories flashing in my head - sliding, holding hands, kissing, a bathtub, his softness, humour and his dark, brooding, sexy look. I miss him. It was five days, five days of agony that felt like an eternity. I wrap my arms around the body, cuddle tightly, holding on together. I miss him. I really miss him ... I love him. Simple.I cry myself to sleep at night, wishing I had not gone out, wanting to wanting us to be together. How long will this disgusting irresistible feeling last? I'm in purgatory. Anastasia Steele, you're at work! I have to be strong, but I want to go to Jose's show, and in the back of my time the masochist wants to see Christian. With a deep sigh, I'll take a breath to my desk. From: Anastasia SteeleSubject: TomorrowDate: June 8, 2011 14:25To: Christian GreyHi ChristianThank you for flowers; they're beautiful. Yes, I would appreciate the elevator. Thank you. Anastasia SteeleAssistant Jack Hyde, Commissioning Editor, SIPChecking My Phone, I believe he still switches to distraction. Jack's meeting, so I'll quickly call Jose. Hello, Jose. It's Ana. Hello, stranger. His tone is so warm and hospitable it's almost enough to push me over the edge again. I can't talk for long. In time should I be there tomorrow for your show? He sounds excited. Yes of course. I smile my first genuine smile in five days as I imagine it with a broad smile. Seven-thirty. See you later. Goodbye, Jose. Bye, Ana. From: Christian GreySubject: TomorrowDate: June 8, 2011 14:27To: Anastasia SteeleDear AnastasiaA The time I will collect you? Christian GreyCEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings Inc.From: Anastasia SteeleSubject: TomorrowDate: June 8, 2011 14:32To: The Christian GreyJose Show begins at 7:30. In if you offered, in time? Anastasia SteeleTo Jack Hyde, Commissioning Editor, SIPFrom: Christian GreySubject: TomorrowDate: June 8, 2011 14:34To: Anastasia SteeleDear AnastasiaPortland is some distance away. I'm looking forward to seeing you. Christian GreyCEO, Grey Enterprises Holdings Inc.From: Anastasia SteeleSubject: TomorrowDate: June 8, 2011 14:38To: Christian GreySee you then. Anastasia StillUistant Jack Hyde, Commissioning Editor, SIPOh Mine. I'm going to see Christian, and for the first time in five days, my mood lift the part and I let myself wonder how he was. Did he miss me? Probably not the way I missed him. Did he find a new submissive wherever they came from? The thought is so painful that I fire him immediately. I look at a bunch of correspondence I need to sort for Jack and tackle her as I try to push Christian out of my mind again. That night in bed, I give and turn, trying to fall asleep. This is the first time in a long time I have not cried myself to sleep. In my mind, I visualized Christian's face the last time I saw him as I left his apartment. His tortured expression haunts me. I remember he didn't want me to walk, which was weird. Why would I stay when everything was over? We each skirting around our own issues - my fear of punishment, his fear of ... A what? Love? Turning on my side, I hug a pillow filled with irresistible sadness. He thinks he doesn't to be loved. Why does he feel like that? Does this have anything to do with his upbringing? His birth mom, a crack crack My thoughts plague me in the early hours until eventually I fall into a suitable, exhausted sleep. Day drags and drags, and Jack is extraordinarily attentive. I suspect it's Kate's plum dress and black high-heeled boots that I stole from her closet, but I don't stop at the thought. I'm shopping for clothes from my first paycheck. The dress is freer on me than it was, but I pretend I don't notice. Finally, five-thirty, and I'm packing my jacket and purse, trying to suppress my nerves. I'm going to see it! Do you have a date tonight? Jack asks as he strolls past my desk on his way out. Yes. No. Not really. He taps his eyebrows at me, his interest clearly piqued. Guy? I'm washing it off. No, my friend. An ex-boyfriend. Maybe tomorrow you would like to come for a drink after work. You had a stellar first week, Ana. We have to celebrate. He smiles and some unknown emotion flogs across his face, which makes me uneasy. Putting his hands in his pockets, he strolled through the double doors. I frowned 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 pass first. How am I going to do that? I'm rushing to the bathroom to make last-minute adjustments. In a large mirror on the wall, I take a long, hard look at my face. I am my usual pale self, dark circles around my too-large eyes. I look skinny, haunted. God, I'd like to know how to use makeup. I apply some mascara and eyeliner and pinch my cheeks, hoping to bring some color your way. Removing my hair so that it sits artfully behind my back, I take a deep breath. It's going to have to be done. Nervously I walk through the foyer with a smile and a wave of Claire at the front desk. I think she and I could be friends. Jack talks to Elizabeth when I head to the door. Smiling broadly, he rushes to open them for me. After you, Ana, he mutters. Thank you. I'm smiling, I'm embarrassed. Outside on the side of the road, Taylor is waiting. He opens the back door of the car. I'm hesitant on Jack who followed me. He looks anxiously at the Audi SUV. I turn and climb in the back, and there he sits - Christian Grey - in a gray suit, without a tie, his white shirt is open on the collar. His gray eyes glow. My mouth is drying. He looks great, except that frown on me. Oh no! When was the last time you ate? He clicks as Taylor closes the door behind me. That's bullshit. Hello, Christian. Yes, it's good to see you, too. I don't want your smart mouth. Answer me. His eyes are burning. Holy crap. Hmm... I had yogurt at lunchtime. Oh, and a banana. When was the last time you eat right? He asks acidentally. Taylor slides into the driver's seat, starts the car, and pulls out into motion. I glanced up and Jack waved to me, though, as he see me through the dark glass, I don't know. I wave back. Who is this? Christian snapshots. My boss. I look at the beautiful man next to me, me, mouth pressed against the hard line. Ok? Your last meal? Christian, is really none of your business, - I mutter, feeling extraordinarily brave. Whatever you do, it's about me. Tell me about it. No, it's not. I moaned with disappointment, rolling my eyes into the sky, and Christian narrows his eyes. And for the first time in a long time, I want to laugh. I try to smother a giggle that threatens to bubble up. Christian's face softens when I struggle to keep a straight face and I see a trail of smiles kiss his beautifully sculpted lips. Well? He asked, his voice softer. Pasta Alla Wongole, last Friday - I whisper. I see, he says, his voice inexpressive. You look like you've lost at least five pounds, perhaps more since then. Please sing, Anastasia, he scolds. I stare at the knotted fingers on my knees. Why does he always make me feel like an itinerant child? He shifts and turns to me. How are you? He asked, his voice still soft. Well, I'm shit really... I'm swallowing. If I told you I was fine, I'd be lying. He inhales sharply. Me too, he mutters, and reaches out and fastens my hand. I miss you, he adds. Oh no. Skin versus skin. Christian, I'm Ana, please. We need to talk. I'll pay for it. No. Christian. I... I cried so much, I whisper, trying to keep my emotions under control: Oh baby, no. He pulls my hand, and before I know it, I'm on his lap. He hugged me, and my nose is in my hair. I missed you so much, Anastasia, he breathes. I want to fight out of his hold to keep some distance, but his arms are wrapped around me. He's pushing me to my chest. I'm melting. Oh, that's where I want to be. I rest my head against him and he kisses my hair repeatedly. It's a house. It smells like linen, fabric softener, body wash, and my favorite smell is Christian. For a moment I allow myself the illusion that everything will be fine, and it soothes my ravaged soul. A few minutes later, Taylor stops by the side of the road, even though we're still in town. Come - Christian displaces me from my knees - we're here. A what? The helipad is on top of this building. Christian looks at the building as an explanation. Of course. Charlie Tango. Taylor opens the door, and I slip. It gives me a warm, avuncular smile that makes me feel safe. I smile back. I have to give you the headscarf back. Keep it, Miss Steele, with my best wishes. I flush as Christian comes around the car and takes my hand. He looks quizzically at Taylor, who looks impassively back at him without revealing anything. Nine? Christian tells him. Yes sir. Christian nods as he turns and leads me through the double doors into the grand foyer. I am feeling his big hand and his long, skifful fingers curled around mine. I feel a familiar pull -- I turns, Icarus to his sun. I was already, and yet here I am again. When he reaches the elevators, he presses the call button. I'm spying on him, and he's wearing his mysterious half-foot. When the doors open, he frees my hand and introduces me. The doors close, and I risk a second look. He looks at me, the gray eyes are alive, and it's there in the air between us, that electricity. It's palpable. I can almost try it, throbbing between us, bringing us together. Oh mine, I gasp as I bask briefly in the intensity of this visceral, primal attraction. I can feel it too, he says, his eyes are clouded and intense. The aspiration pools are dark and deadly in the groin. He clamps my hand and grazes my knuckles with his thumb, and all my muscles shrink tightly, deliciously, deep inside me. Holy cow. How can he still do this to me? Please don't bite your lips, Anastasia, he whispers. I look at him, releasing my lip. I need him. Here, now, in the elevator. How could I not? You know what he's doing to me, he mutters. Oh, I'm still influencing him. My inner goddess stirs from her five-day pout. Suddenly the doors open, breaking the spell, and we're on the roof. It's windy, and despite my black jacket, I'm cold. Christian hugged me, pulling me in his direction, and we rush to where Charlie Tango stands in the center of the helipad with her rotor blades slowly spinning. A tall, light, square-jawed man in a dark suit pops up and, diving low, runs towards us. Shaking Christian's hand, he shouts over the noise of the rotors. Ready to go, sir. It's yours! Have all the checks been done. Will you collect it for about eight-thirty? Taylor's waiting for you in front. Thank you, Mr. Gray. Safe flight to Portland. Ma'am. He welcomes me. Without letting me out, Christian nods, dives down and leads me to the helicopter door. Once inside he buckled me firmly into my harness, cinching the straps tightly. He gives me a knowing look and his secret smile. This should keep you in your place, he mutters. I have to say I like this harness on you. Don't touch anything. I rinse a deep crimson and it runs with my index finger down my cheek before handing me the headphones. I'd like to touch you, too, but you won't let me. I frown on him. He also pulled the straps so tight that I could barely move. He sits in his seat and buckles himself and then starts working through all his pre-flight checks. He's so competent. It's very tempting. He puts on his headphones and flips the switch, and the rotors accelerate, stunning me. Turning, he looks at me. Ready, baby? His voice echoes through the headphones. Yes. He smiles with his boyish smile. Wow - I haven't seen it in so long. The Sea-Tac Tower is Charlie Tango - Tango Echo Hotel, cleared for takeoff in Portland via PDX. Please confirm more. The Disembodied voice responds by issuing instructions. Roger, Tower, Charlie Tango set, over and over again. Christian flips two two grabs a stick, and the helicopter slowly and smoothly rises into the evening sky. Seattle and my stomach fall away from us, and there's so much to see. We were chasing dawn, Anastasia, it's dusk now - his voice comes through headphones. I turn to yawn at him with surprise. What does that mean? How is it that he can say the most romantic things? He smiles and I can't help but smile sheepishly back at him. Like the evening sun, there's more to see this time, he says. The last time we flew to Seattle it was dark, but tonight the view is spectacular, literally from this world. We are among the tallest buildings, higher and higher. Escalats in there. He points to the building. Boeing is there and you can just see the space needle. I'm going to get my head around. I've never been. I'll take you - we can eat

there. A what? Christian, we broke up. I know. I can still take you there and feed you. He's looking at me. I shake my head and flush before taking a less confrontational approach. It's beautiful here, thank you. Impressive, isn't it? is impressive that you can do that. Flattery from you, Miss Steele? But I'm a man of many talents. I am fully aware of this, Mr. Gray. He turns and grins at me, and for the first time in five days, I relax a bit. Maybe it won't be so bad. How's the new job? Interesting. What's your boss like? How can I tell Christian that Jack makes me uncomfortable? Christian turns and looks at me. What's wrong? He asks. Aside from the obvious, nothing. Oh, Christian, you're sometimes very stupid. Stupid? Me? I'm not sure I appreciate your tone, Miss Steele. Well, not then. His lips twitch into a smile. I missed your smart mouth. I'm suffocating and I want to scream, I missed you - all of you - not just in your mouth! But I keep quiet and look at the glass aquarium that has the windshield of Charlie Tango as we continue south. Twilight to our right, the sun is low on the horizon - big, blazing fiery orange - and I I Icarus again, flying too close. Twilight followed us from Seattle, and the sky is awash with opal, cloves and aquamarines woven smoothly together as soon as Mother Nature knows how. It's a clear, crisp evening, and Portland lights flicker and wink, greeting us as Christian sets the helicopter down to the helipad. We are on top of a strange brown brick building in Portland we left less than three weeks ago. God, it was almost any time at all. However, I feel like I've known Christian all my life. He powers down Charlie Tango, flipping various switches to stop the rotors, and ultimately all I hear is my own breathing through the headphones. Hmm. Briefly, it reminds me of the experience of Thomas Tallis. I blanch. I don't want to go there right now. Christian unbuttoned the harness and to undo mine. Good trip, Miss Miss he asks his voice soft, his gray eyes glowing. Yes, thank you, Mr. Gray, I say politely. He holds his hand to me and taking it out, I climb out of Charlie Tango. A gray-haired man with a beard comes up to meet us, smiling broadly, and I recognize him as the old time from the last time we were here . Joe. Christian smiles and lets out my hand to shake Joe's warmth. Keep her safe for Stefan. It will be together about eight or nine. You'll do it, Mr. Gray. Ma'am, he says, nodding at me. Your car is waiting downstairs, sir. Yes, and the elevator is out of order; You will need to use the stairs. Thank you, Joe. Christian takes my hand and we head to the emergency ladder. It's good that for you it's only three floors, in these heels, - he mutters to me in disapproval. I'm not joking. Don't you like boots? His eyes darken and I think he can say something different, but he stops. Come. We will take it slowly. I don't want you to fall and break your neck. We sit in silence as our driver leads us into the gallery. My anxiety is back in full force and I realize that our time at Charlie Tango was the eye of the storm. Christian is quiet and brooding... Fearing even; our light mood from the earlier dissipated. There's so much I want to say, but it's too short. Christian looks wistfully out the window. Jose is just a friend, - I mutter. His mouth -- his mouth distracted, and unbidden. I remember it on me everywhere. My skin is heating up. He shifts to his seat and frowns. These beautiful eyes look too big in your face, Anastasia. Please tell me what you will eat. Yes, Christian, I will eat, - I automatically answer, banality. I mean that. Are you here now? I can't keep the contempt out of my voice. Frankly, this man's courage is this man who has put me through hell over the last few days. No, that's not right. I've been through hell. No. It's him. I shake my head, confused. I don't want to fight you, Anastasia. I want you back, and I want you to be healthy, he says quietly. A what? What does that mean? But nothing has 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 comes out, leaving me speechless. He opens the car door for me and I scramble. Why are you doing this? My voice is louder than I expected. What to do? Christian is puzzled. Say something like that, and then just stop. Anastasia, we're here. Where you want to be. Let's do it, and then we'll talk. I don't particularly want a scene on the street. I flush and look around. He's right. It's too public. I press my lips together as he looks at me. All right, I mutter. Taking my hand, he leads me into the building. We are in a converted warehouse - brick brick dark wooden floors, white ceilings and white work pipes. It's airy and modern, and there are several people wandering around the gallery floor, sipping wine and admiring Jose's work. For a moment, my problems melt away as I realized that Jose had fulfilled his dream. Way, Jose! Good evening and welcome to the show Jose Rodriguez . A young woman dressed in black with very short brown hair, bright red lipstick and large hoop earrings greets us. She briefly looks at me, then much longer than it is strictly necessary on Christian, and then turns to me, blinking as she blushes. I have folds on my forehead. He was mine - or was. I try not to frown at her. As her eyes regain her attention, she flashes again. Oh, it's you, Ana. We want you to take it all on, too. Greening, she hands me a pamphlet and guides me to a table loaded with drinks and snacks. How does she know my name? Do you know her? Christian frowns. I shake my head, equally puzzled. He shrugs, he's distracted. What would you like to drink? I have a glass of white wine, thank you. His eyebrows furrow, but he holds his tongue and heads to the open bar. Ana! Jose comes barrel through a crowd of people. Holy cow! He's wearing a suit. He looks good and shines on me. He hugs me, hugs me tightly. And that's all I can do to not cry. My friend, my only friend, while Kate is on the sidelines. Tears pool in my eyes. Ana, I'm so glad you did, he whispers in my ear, then stops and abruptly holds me at arm's length, looking at me. Hey, are you okay? You look, you're weird. Dios Mio, have you lost weight? I'm blinking in tears. Jose, I'm fine. I'm just so happy for you. He's not the shit, either. Congratulations on the show. My voice wavers as I see his concern engraved on his oh-so-familiar face, but I have to keep myself together. How did you get here? He asks. Christian brought me, I say, suddenly fearing. About. Jose's face falls, and he frees me. Where is he? His expression darkens. First, for the drinks. I nodded in Christian's direction and saw him exchanging pleasantries with someone waiting in line. Christian looks up when I look his way and our eyes lock. And in that short moment, I'm paralyzed looking at an incredibly handsome man who looks at me with some unfathomable emotions. His gaze was hot, burning at me, and we got lost for a moment, looking at each other. Holy cow... This lovely man wants me back, and deep me sweet joy slowly unfolds like morning glory at early dawn. Ana! Jose distracts me, and I'm being dragged back here and now. I'm so glad you're here - listen, I have to warn you - Suddenly, Miss very short hair and red lipstick cuts it off. Jose, Portland-based journalist here to see you. Come on, she gives me a polite smile. How cool is that? Thank. He smiles and I can't help but smile back - he's so happy. Catch you you Ana. He kisses my cheek, and I watch him walk towards a young woman standing next to a tall lanky photographer. Jose's photographs are everywhere, and in some cases, blown up on huge canvases. There are both monochrome and flowers. Many landscapes have unearthly beauty. In one taken out near a lake in Vancouver, it's early evening and pink clouds are reflected in still water. In short, I transported peace and quiet. How thrilling. Christian joins me, and I took a deep breath and swallowed, trying to regain some of my previous equilibrium. He hands me my glass of white wine. Does it come to zero? My voice sounds more normal. He looks quizzically at me. Wine. No. Rarely happens at this kind of event. The boy is very talented, isn't he? Christian admires the photograph of the lake. Why else do you think I asked him to take your portrait? I can't help but be proud of my voice. His eyes glide impassively from the photo to me. Christian Grey? A photographer from Portland Printz Approaches Christian. Can I have a picture, sir? Christian hides his frown. I back off, but he grabs my hand and pulls me to his side. The photographer looks at both of us and can't hide his surprise. Mr. Gray, thank you. He takes a couple of pictures. Miss...? He asked. Steele, I reply. He's singing. I was looking for pictures of you with dates on the Internet. They're gone. That's why Kate thought you were gay. Christian's mouth twitches with a smile. That explains your inappropriate question. No, I'm not dating, Anastasia's just you. But you know that. His eyes burn with sincerity. So you've never taken yours - I look around nervously to check no one can overhear us - spare from? Sometimes. Not on dates. Shopping, you know. He shrugs, his eyes don't leave mine. Oh, so only in the playroom - his Red Pain Room and his apartment. I don't know what to think about it. It's just you, Anastasia, he whispers. I blush and stare at my fingers. In his own way, he takes care of me. Your friend here seems more like a landscaper than a portrait. Let's take a look around. He's holding his hand for me, and I'm taking it. We wander past a few more prints, and I notice a couple nodding at me, smiling broadly as if they knew me. It must be because I'm with Christian, but one young man is frank. Odd. We turn the corner and I can understand why I get strange looks. Hanging on a distant wall seven huge portraits - about me. I stare blankly at them, stunned, blood flowing from my face. Me: sulking, laughing, frowning, seriously, amuse. All in super close-up, all in black and white. Lord! I remember Jose messing around with the camera a couple of times when he was visiting and when I was with him as a driver and assistant photographer. He took pictures, or so I thought. Not invasive candidides. I look at Christian, who looks, freezes, at each of the paintings in turn. I don't think I'm the only one, he mutters enigmatically, his mouth settling in a hard line. I think he's angry. Oh no. I'm sorry, he says, pressing me with his bright grey look for a moment. He turns around and heads to the front desk. What's his problem? I look measurable as he speaks animatedly with miss very short hair and red lipstick. He's going to catch his wallet and get his credit card. That's bullshit. He must have bought one of them. Hey. You're a muse. These pictures are stunning. A young man with the shock of bright blond hair starts me. I feel my hand on my elbow and Christian is back. You're a happy guy. Blonde Shock grins at Christian, who gives him a cool look. What am I, he mutters grimly as he pulls me to one side. Did you just buy one of them? He snorts without swiping his eyes. Did you buy more than one? He rolls his eyes. I bought them all, Anastasia. I don't want some stranger ogling you into the privacy of his home. My first inclination was to laugh. Would you rather it be you? I'm making fun of me. He looks at me, caught by surprise by my audacity, I think, but he tries to hide his entertainment . Frankly, yes. A pervert, I get tired of him and bite my lower lip to keep him from smiling. His mouth falls open, and now his amusement is obvious. He strokes his chin thoughtfully. I 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 signed the NDA. He sighs as he looks at me, and his eyes darken. What I would do to your smart mouth, it's murmuring. I'm suffocating, knowing full well what he means. You're very rude. I try to sound shocked and succeed. He has no boundaries? He grins at me, amused, and then he frowns. You look very relaxed in these photos. Anastasia. I don't see you like that very often. A what? Hey! Changing the theme - talk about not sequitur - from playful to serious. I flush and look down on my fingers. He tilts my head backwards and I inhale sharply upon contact with his long fingers. I want you to relax with me, he whispers. All traces of humor have disappeared. Deep inside me, that joy stirs again. But how can it be? We have problems. You have to stop intimidating me if you want that I snap. You have to learn to communicate and tell me how you feel, it clicks back, your eyes blazing. I took a deep breath. Christian, you wanted me to be submissive. That's the problem. It's in definition submissive - you emailed me once. I stop trying to remember the wording. I think the synonyms were, and I quote: compliant, malleable, malleable, passive, tractable, resigned, patient, tame, subdued. I shouldn't have looked at you. Don't talk to you until you give me permission to do so. What do you expect? I'm his in blinking, and his frown deepens as I continue. It's very confusing to be with you. You don't want me to challenge you, but then you like my smart mouth. You want obedience, except when you don't know it, so you can punish me. I just don't know which way up when I'm with you. He narrows his eyes. A good moment was well done, as usual, Miss Steele. His voice is cold. Let's eat. We've only been here half an hour. You've seen the pictures; You talked to the boy. His name is Jose. You spoke to Jose - the man who, the last time I met him, tried to push his tongue into your reluctant mouth while you were drunk and sick, he growls. He never hit me, I spat at him. Christian frowns at me, the fury comes from every pore. It's a low blow, Anastasia, he whispers menacingly. I flush, and Christian runs his hands through his hair, bristling with barely contained anger. I'm looking at him. I'm taking you to something to eat. You're fading in front of me. Find the boy, say goodbye. Please, can we stay longer? No. Go. Nwo. Say goodbye. I look at him, my blood boils. Mr. Damned Control Freak. Angry is good. Angry is better than tears. I'm looking away from it and scanning the room for Jose. He's talking to a group of young women. I'm a stalk to him and from fifty. Just because he brought me here, should I do what he says? Who's he going to think of himself? Girls hang on every word Jose. One of them gasps as I approach, no doubt acknowledging me for the portraits. Jose. Ana. Sorry, girls. Jose smiles at them and puts his hand around me, and on some level I amuse - Jose everything is smooth, impressing ladies . You look crazy, he says. I have to go, mumble I mulishly . You just got here. I know, but Christian needs to go back. The pictures are fantastic, Jose - you are very talented. He beams. It was so great to see you. Jose sweeps me into a big bear hug, spinning me so I can see a christian through the gallery. He's frowning, and I realize it's because I'm in Jose's arms. So in a very calculating move, I wrap my arms around Jose's neck. I think Christian is expiring. His glare darkens at something rather sinister, and slowly he makes his way to us. Thank you for warning about my portraits, I mutter. Sorry, Ana. I should have told you. Do you like them? I don't know, I answer honestly, momentarily knocking my question off balance. Well, they're all sold out, so someone likes them. How cool is that? You're a poster girl. He hugs me even tougher as Christian reaches us, glowing at me now, though luckily Jose doesn't see it. Jose frees me. Don't be a stranger, Ana. Oh, Mr. Gray, good evening. Mr. Rodriguez, very impressive. Christian sounds more polite in Sicilian. To me that we can't stay longer, but we have to go back to Seattle. Anastasia? He subtly emphasizes that we and takes my hand as like does it. Bye, Jose. Congratulations again. I quickly kissed him on the cheek, and before I know it, Christian pulls me out of the building. I know he's boiling with silent anger, but I'm a he-n. He quickly looks up and down the street, then heads to the left and suddenly sweeps me into the side lane, sharply pushing me against the wall. He grabs me by the face between his hands, making me look into his fervent resolute eyes. I'm suffocating, and his mouth is swooping down. He kisses me, furiously. Briefly our teeth clash, then his tongue in his mouth. The urge explodes like the Fourth of July all over my body, and I kiss it back, matching his fervor, my hands tying in my hair, pulling it, hard. He moans, a low sexy sound at the back of his throat that bounces through me, and his hand moves down my body to the top of my thigh, fingers digging into my flesh through the plum dress. I pour all the anguish and grief of the last few days into our kiss, tying it to me, and it amazes me - at this moment of dazzling passion - he does the same, he feels the same. He breaks the kiss, gasping for breath. His eyes glow with desire, shooting already heated blood that knocks through my body. My mouth is sluggish as I try to drag precious air into my lungs. You. Have. Mine, he growls, emphasizing every word. He pushes away from me and bends over, his hands on his knees as if he's running a marathon. For God's sake, Ana. I leaned against the wall, gasping for breath, trying to control the violent reaction in my body, trying to find my balance again. I'm sorry, I whisper as soon as my breath returns. You have to be. I know what you were doing. Do you need a photographer, Anastasia? He obviously has feelings for you. I flush and shake my head. No. He's just a friend. I've spent my entire adult life trying to avoid any extreme emotions. However, you... You bring out feelings in me that are totally alien. It's very... He frowns, grasping at the word. Violation. I like the control, Ana, and around you that just - he stands, his gaze intense - evaporates. He waves his hand vaguely, then passes through his hair and takes a deep breath. He's shaking my hand. Come, we need to talk, and you should eat.

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