

Fifty Shades Trilogy

E L James



Fifty Shades of Grey

Fifty Shades Darker



Fifty Shades Freed

FIFTY SHADES

Trilogy

E L James



Vintage Books
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The author published an earlier serialized version of these stories online with different characters as "Master of the Universe" under the pseudonym Snowqueen's Icedragon.

Vintage eISBN: 978-0-345-80357-3

Trilogy cover design by Peter Quach

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Fifty Shades of Grey

E L James

#1 New York Times Bestseller

FIFTY SHADES *of* GREY

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Vintage Books
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FIRST VINTAGE BOOKS EDITION, APRIL 2012

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The Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at Library of Congress.

Vintage Books Trade Paperback ISBN: 978-0-345-80348-1

eISBN: 978-1-61213-029-3

Movie Tie-In ISBN: 928-0-8041-7207-3

Book design by Claudia Martinez

Cover image © Random House LLC photo by Papuga2006

Cover design by Jennifer McGuire

www.vintagebooks.com

v4.1

*For Niall,
the master of my universe*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to the following people for their help and support:

To my husband, Niall, thank you for tolerating my obsession, being a domestic god, and doing the first edit.

To my boss, Lisa, thank you for putting up with me over the last year or so while I indulged in this madness.

To CCL, I'll never tell, but thank you.

To the original bunker babes, thank you for your friendship and constant support.

To SR, thank you for all the helpful advice from the start and for going first.

To Sue Malone, thanks for sorting me out.

Thank you to Anne Messitte and all at Random House for believing.

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CHAPTER ONE

I scowl with frustration at myself in the mirror. Damn my hair—it just won't behave, and damn Katherine Kavanagh for being ill and subjecting me to this ordeal. I should be studying for my final exams, which are next week, yet here I am trying to brush my hair into submission. *I must not sleep with it wet. I must not sleep with it wet.* Reciting this mantra several times, I attempt, once more, to bring it under control with the brush. I roll my eyes in exasperation and gaze at the pale, brown-haired girl with blue eyes too big for her face staring back at me, and give up. My only option is to restrain my wayward hair in a ponytail and hope that I look semi-presentable.

Kate is my roommate, and she has chosen today of all days to succumb to the flu. Therefore, she cannot attend the interview she'd arranged to do, with some mega-industrialist tycoon I've never heard of, for the student newspaper. So I have been volunteered. I have final exams to cram for and one essay to finish, and I'm supposed to be working this afternoon, but no—today I have to drive 165 miles to downtown Seattle in order to meet the enigmatic CEO of Grey Enterprises Holdings, Inc. As an exceptional entrepreneur and major benefactor of our university, his time is extraordinarily precious—much more precious than mine—but he has granted Kate an interview. A real coup, she tells me. Damn her extracurricular activities.

Kate is huddled on the couch in the living room.

"Ana, I'm sorry. It took me nine months to get this interview. It will take another six to reschedule, and we'll both have graduated by then. As the editor, I can't blow this off. Please," Kate begs me in her rasping, sore throat voice. How does she do it? Even ill she looks

gamine and gorgeous, strawberry blond hair in place and green eyes bright, although now red rimmed and runny. I ignore my pang of unwelcome sympathy.

“Of course I’ll go, Kate. You should get back to bed. Would you like some NyQuil or Tylenol?”

“NyQuil, please. Here are the questions and my digital recorder. Just press record here. Make notes, I’ll transcribe it all.”

“I know nothing about him,” I murmur, trying and failing to suppress my rising panic.

“The questions will see you through. Go. It’s a long drive. I don’t want you to be late.”

“Okay, I’m going. Get back to bed. I made you some soup to heat up later.” I stare at her fondly. *Only for you, Kate, would I do this.*

“I will. Good luck. And thanks, Ana—as usual, you’re my lifesaver.”

Gathering my backpack, I smile wryly at her, then head out the door to the car. I cannot believe I have let Kate talk me into this. But then Kate can talk anyone into anything. She’ll make an exceptional journalist. She’s articulate, strong, persuasive, argumentative, beautiful—and she’s my dearest, dearest friend.

THE ROADS ARE CLEAR as I set off from Vancouver, Washington, toward Interstate 5. It’s early, and I don’t have to be in Seattle until two this afternoon. Fortunately, Kate has lent me her sporty Mercedes CLK. I’m not sure Wanda, my old VW Beetle, would make the journey in time. Oh, the Merc is a fun drive, and the miles slip away as I hit the pedal to the metal.

My destination is the headquarters of Mr. Grey’s global enterprise. It’s a huge twenty-story office building, all curved glass and steel, an architect’s utilitarian fantasy, with GREY HOUSE written discreetly in steel over the glass front doors. It’s a quarter to two when I arrive, greatly relieved that I’m not late as I walk into the enormous—and frankly intimidating—glass, steel, and white sandstone lobby.

Behind the solid sandstone desk, a very attractive, groomed, blonde young woman smiles pleasantly at me. She’s wearing the

sharpest charcoal suit jacket and white shirt I have ever seen. She looks immaculate.

"I'm here to see Mr. Grey. Anastasia Steele for Katherine Kavanagh."

"Excuse me one moment, Miss Steele." She arches her eyebrow as I stand self-consciously before her. I'm beginning to wish I'd borrowed one of Kate's formal blazers rather than worn my navy-blue jacket. I have made an effort and worn my one and only skirt, my sensible brown knee-length boots, and a blue sweater. For me, this is smart. I tuck one of the escaped tendrils of my hair behind my ear as I pretend she doesn't intimidate me.

"Miss Kavanagh is expected. Please sign in here, Miss Steele. You'll want the last elevator on the right, press for the twentieth floor." She smiles kindly at me, amused no doubt, as I sign in.

She hands me a security pass that has "visitor" very firmly stamped on the front. I can't help my smirk. Surely it's obvious that I'm just visiting. I don't fit in here at all. *Nothing changes*. I inwardly sigh. Thanking her, I walk over to the bank of elevators and past the two security men who are both far more smartly dressed than I am in their well-cut black suits.

The elevator whisks me at terminal velocity to the twentieth floor. The doors slide open, and I'm in another large lobby—again all glass, steel, and white sandstone. I'm confronted by another desk of sandstone and another young blonde woman, this time dressed impeccably in black and white, who rises to greet me.

"Miss Steele, could you wait here, please?" She points to a seated area of white leather chairs.

Behind the leather chairs is a spacious glass-walled meeting room with an equally spacious dark wood table and at least twenty matching chairs around it. Beyond that, there is a floor-to-ceiling window with a view of the Seattle skyline that looks out through the city toward the Sound. It's a stunning vista, and I'm momentarily paralyzed by the view. *Wow*.

I sit down, fish the questions from my backpack, and go through them, inwardly cursing Kate for not providing me with a brief biography. I know nothing about this man I'm about to interview. He could be ninety or he could be thirty. The uncertainty is galling, and my nerves resurface, making me fidget. I've never been comfortable with one-on-one interviews, preferring the anonymity of a group discussion where I can sit inconspicuously at the back of the room. To be honest, I prefer my own company, reading a classic British novel, curled up in a chair in the campus library. Not sitting twitching nervously in a colossal glass-and-stone edifice.

I roll my eyes at myself. *Get a grip, Steele*. Judging from the building, which is too clinical and modern, I guess Grey is in his forties: fit, tanned, and fair-haired to match the rest of the personnel.

Another elegant, flawlessly dressed blonde comes out of a large door to the right. What is it with all the immaculate blondes? It's like Stepford here. Taking a deep breath, I stand up.

"Miss Steele?" the latest blonde asks.

"Yes," I croak, and clear my throat. "Yes." There, that sounded more confident.

"Mr. Grey will see you in a moment. May I take your jacket?"

"Oh, please." I struggle out of the jacket.

"Have you been offered any refreshment?"

"Um—no." Oh dear, is Blonde Number One in trouble?

Blonde Number Two frowns and eyes the young woman at the desk.

"Would you like tea, coffee, water?" she asks, turning her attention back to me.

"A glass of water. Thank you," I murmur.

"Olivia, please fetch Miss Steele a glass of water." Her voice is stern. Olivia scoots up and scurries to a door on the other side of the foyer.

"My apologies, Miss Steele, Olivia is our new intern. Please be seated. Mr. Grey will be another five minutes."

Olivia returns with a glass of iced water.

"Here you go, Miss Steele."

"Thank you."

Blonde Number Two marches over to the large desk, her heels clicking and echoing on the sandstone floor. She sits down, and they both continue their work.

Perhaps Mr. Grey insists on all his employees being blonde. I'm wondering idly if that's legal, when the office door opens and a tall, elegantly dressed, attractive African American man with short dreads exits. I have definitely worn the wrong clothes.

He turns and says through the door, "Golf this week, Grey?"

I don't hear the reply. He turns, sees me, and smiles, his dark eyes crinkling at the corners. Olivia has jumped up and called the elevator. She seems to excel at jumping from her seat. She's more nervous than me!

"Good afternoon, ladies," he says as he departs through the sliding door.

"Mr. Grey will see you now, Miss Steele. Do go through," Blonde Number Two says. I stand rather shakily, trying to suppress my nerves. Gathering up my backpack, I abandon my glass of water and make my way to the partially open door.

"You don't need to knock—just go in." She smiles kindly.

I push open the door and stumble through, tripping over my own feet and falling headfirst into the office.

Double crap—me and my two left feet! I am on my hands and knees in the doorway to Mr. Grey's office, and gentle hands are around me, helping me to stand. I am so embarrassed, damn my clumsiness. I have to steel myself to glance up. Holy cow—he's so young.

"Miss Kavanagh." He extends a long-fingered hand to me once I'm upright. "I'm Christian Grey. Are you all right? Would you like to sit?"

So young—and attractive, very attractive. He's tall, dressed in a fine gray suit, white shirt, and black tie with unruly dark copper-

colored hair and intense, bright gray eyes that regard me shrewdly. It takes a moment for me to find my voice.

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

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

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

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

“I see,” he says simply. I think I see the ghost of a smile in his expression, but I’m not sure.

“Would you like to sit?” He waves me toward an L-shaped white leather couch.

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

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

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

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

Apart from the paintings, the rest of the office is cold, clean, and clinical. I wonder if it reflects the personality of the Adonis who sinks

gracefully into one of the white leather chairs opposite me. I shake my head, disturbed at the direction of my thoughts, and retrieve Kate's questions from my backpack. Next, I set up the digital recorder and am all fingers and thumbs, dropping it twice on the coffee table in front of me. Mr. Grey says nothing, waiting patiently—I hope—as I become increasingly embarrassed and flustered. When I pluck up the courage to look at him, he's watching me, one hand relaxed in his lap and the other cupping his chin and trailing his long index finger across his lips. I think he's trying to suppress a smile.

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

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

"Do you mind if I record your answers?"

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

I flush. He's teasing me? I hope. I blink at him, unsure what to say, and I think he takes pity on me because he relents. "No, I don't mind."

"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 conferring the degrees at this year's graduation ceremony."

Oh! This is news to me, and I'm temporarily preoccupied by the thought that someone not much older than me—okay, maybe six years or so, and okay, mega-successful, but still—is going to present me with my degree. I frown, dragging my wayward attention back to the task at hand.

"Good." I swallow nervously. "I have some questions, Mr. Grey." I smooth a stray lock of hair behind my ear.

"I thought you might," he says, deadpan. He's laughing at me. My cheeks heat at the realization, and I sit up and square my shoulders in an attempt to look taller and more intimidating. Pressing the start button on the recorder, I try to look professional.

“You’re very young to have amassed such an empire. To what do you owe your success?” I glance up at him. His smile is rueful, but he looks vaguely disappointed.

“Business is all about people, Miss Steele, and I’m very good at judging people. I know how they tick, what makes them flourish, what doesn’t, what inspires them, and how to incentivize them. I employ an exceptional team, and I reward them well.” He pauses and fixes me with his gray stare. “My belief is to achieve success in any scheme one has to make oneself master of that scheme, know it inside and out, know every detail. I work hard, very hard to do that. I make decisions based on logic and facts. I have a natural gut instinct that can spot and nurture a good solid idea and good people. The bottom line is it’s always down to good people.”

“Maybe you’re just lucky.” This isn’t on Kate’s list—but he’s so arrogant. His eyes flare momentarily in surprise.

“I don’t subscribe to luck or chance, Miss Steele. The harder I work the more luck I seem to have. It really is all about having the right people on your team and directing their energies accordingly. I think it was Harvey Firestone who said, ‘The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership.’ ”

“You sound like a control freak.” The words are out of my mouth before I can stop them.

“Oh, I exercise control in all things, Miss Steele,” he says without a trace of humor in his smile. I look at him, and he holds my gaze steadily, impassive. My heartbeat quickens, and my face flushes again.

Why does he have such an unnerving effect on me? His overwhelming good looks maybe? The way his eyes blaze at me? The way he strokes his index finger against his lower lip? I wish he’d stop doing that.

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

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