

from *The Bourne Ultimatum* by Robert Ludlum

“*Goddamn* it!” shouted Holland, the beam of his flashlight angled down between tree trunks. “They made their break!”

“How can you tell?”

“The grass, son, the heel imprints. Those bastards were overqualified. They dug in for one shot apiece and got out—look at the slip marks on the lawn. Those shoes were running. Forget it! No use now. If they stopped for a second position, they’d blow us into the Smithsonian.”

“A *field* man,” said Alex, getting up with his cane, the frightened, bewildered Panov beside him. Then the doctor spun around, his eyes wide, rushing toward the two fallen Orientals.

“Oh, my God, they’re *dead*,” he cried, kneeling beside the corpses, seeing their blown-apart throats. “*Jesus*, the amusement park! It’s the *same*!”

“A message,” agreed Conklin, nodding, wincing. “Put rock salt on the trail,” he added enigmatically.

“What do you mean?” asked the psychiatrist, snapping his head around at the former intelligence officer.

“We weren’t careful enough.”

“*Alex!*” roared the gray-haired Holland, running to the bench. “I heard you, but this neuters the hotel,” he said breathlessly. “You can’t go there now. I won’t let you.”

“It neuters—*fucks* up—more than the hotel. This isn’t the Jackal! It’s *Hong Kong*! The externals were right, but my instincts were wrong. *Wrong!*”

“Which way do you want to go?” asked the director softly.

from *Breaking Dawn* by Stephenie Meyer

“Stop fidgeting, Bella. Please try to remember that you’re not confessing to a murder here.”

“Easy for you to say.”

I listened to the ominous sound of my father’s boots clomping up the sidewalk. The key rattled in the already open door. The sound reminded me of that part of the horror movie when the victim realizes she’s forgotten to lock her deadbolt.

“Calm down, Bella,” Edward whispered, listening to the acceleration of my heart.

The door slammed against the wall, and I flinched like I’d been Tasered.

“Hey, Charlie,” Edward called, entirely relaxed.

“No!” I protested under my breath.

“What?” Edward whispered back.

“Wait till he hangs his gun up!”

Edward chuckled and ran his free hand through his tousled bronze hair.

Charlie came around the corner, still in his uniform, still armed, and tried not to make a face when he spied us sitting together on the loveseat. Lately, he’d been putting forth a lot of effort to like Edward more. Of course, this revelation was sure to end that effort immediately.

“Hey, kids. What’s up?”

“We’d like to talk to you,” Edward said, so serene. “We have some good news.”

Charlie’s expression went from strained friendliness to black suspicion in a second.

“Good news?” Charlie growled, looking straight at me.

“Have a seat, Dad.”

He raised one eyebrow, stared at me for five seconds, then stomped to the recliner and sat down on the very edge, his back ramrod straight.

from *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E. L. James

“After you,” he murmurs, gesturing with his long-fingered, beautifully manicured hand.

With my heart almost strangling me—because it’s in my throat trying to escape from my mouth—I head down one of the aisles to the electrical section. *Why is he in Portland? Why is he here at Clayton’s?* And from a very tiny, underused part of my brain—probably located at the base of my medulla oblongata near where my subconscious dwells—comes the thought: *He’s here to see you.* No way! I dismiss it immediately. Why would this beautiful, powerful, urbane man want to see me? The idea is preposterous, and I kick it out of my head.

“Are you in Portland on business?” I ask, and my voice is too high, like I’ve got my finger trapped in a door or something. *Damn! Try to be cool, Ana!*

“I was visiting the WSU farming division. It’s based in Vancouver. I’m currently funding some research there in crop rotation and soil science,” he says matter-of-factly. *See? Not here to find you at all,* my subconscious sneers at me, loud, proud, and pouty. I flush at my foolish, wayward thoughts.

“All part of your feed-the-world plan?” I tease.

“Something like that,” he acknowledges, and his lips quirk up in a half smile.

He gazes at the selection of cable ties we stock at Clayton’s. What on Earth is he going to do with those? I cannot picture him as a do-it-yourselfer at all. His fingers trail across the various packages displayed, and for some inexplicable reason, I have to look away. He bends and selects a packet.

“These will do,” he says with his oh-so-secret smile.

“Is there anything else?”

“I’d like some masking tape.”

*Masking tape?*

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“Let me have it!” ordered Gates, rushing forward, his hand outstretched.

“Surely,” said the seventy-year-old disbarred attorney, giving the page to his former student. “It won’t do you much good, however,” he added. “Our Sleaze checked them out, more to inflate his hours than for anything else. Not only are they all squeaky clean, but he performed that unnecessary service after the *real* information was uncovered.”

“What?” asked Gates, his attention diverted from the page. “What information?”

“You were right the first time. Have you discussed—”

“*Nothing* by name,” broke in the retired intelligence officer quickly, firmly.

“I see.”

“You couldn’t,” contradicted Alex. “*I* couldn’t. I’ll be in touch.” With these cryptic words Conklin abruptly hung up.