The Pact

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Extract

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Chapter One

In a room full of men, Terry looked distinctly out of place. Small and skinny, his skin pale as porcelain, he seemed scarcely old enough to buy a drink never mind serve a prison sentence. Like some half-starved Dickensian waif, a pair of wide grey eyes dominated a delicate heart-shaped face. It was a face that was dangerously close to being pretty.

Except today – she stopped dead in her tracks – there were marks on that pale flesh, a large mauve bruise encircling his left eye, a vicious reddening around the jaw.

Hurrying forward, Eve grabbed hold of his arm. 'Jesus! What happened?'

'Nothing.'

'It doesn't look like—'

He shrugged her off, glancing furtively around. 'It's nothing,' he insisted again. This time it was more like a warning than a reply. As if to close the exchange, he quickly sat down, putting his elbows on his knees, and staring at the floor.

'Terry?' She sank down on the chair beside him. She knew they were being watched, examined. The hairs rose up on the back of her neck. And she knew what they were all thinking – the cons, the visitors, even the screws – it hardly took a genius to work it out. Inmates were always being bullied, being harassed, being . . . She

stopped, swallowing hard. She could hardly bring herself to articulate the thought and so settled on the word *abused* instead. It didn't help much.

Her stomach heaved.

Eventually he raised his eyes and forced a smile. 'What are you looking so pissed off about?'

'What do you think?' Anger burned into her cheeks. His injuries were worse close up; there were other bruises staining his neck, purple marks on his slender hands and wrists. She flinched. 'For God's sake.'

'Leave it,' he insisted. 'Just leave it, okay?'

As if she should just accept it, as if it was perfectly normal to see your little brother with half his stupid cupid face smashed in. Not to mention whatever else had . . .

'Tell me, tell me who did it? Who did this to you?'

He gave her one of his full-on incredulous looks. 'I'm not some bloody grass,' he swore softly. 'You know the score, Evie. You want to get me fucking killed?'

'Seems like you're doing a pretty good job of that yourself.' She scowled. 'Anyway, it's *me* you're talking to, not the bleeding Governor.'

He dropped his head into his hands. 'I'm not listening.'

Eve released a low frustrated sigh. That was the trouble with Terry, he never *did* listen. He never had. He'd had the best teacher in the world, their own smart, smooth-talking swindler of a father, but had never had the patience to absorb a single sentence. 'Now' was the only word he'd ever understood. Everything had to be here and now, instant success, instant cash, instant gratification, which was why he'd ended up in this lousy godforsaken hellhole of a place.

And why *she'd* been left with the thankless job of picking up the pieces.

'You could get me a brew,' he said sulkily, 'if it's not too much trouble.'

'Sure.' She got to her feet. 'Whatever.' There was no point pushing him. Perhaps, when he had space to think, he might confide in her. Although the odds weren't great; twenty-one years of stubborn stupidity were unlikely to dissolve in the few minutes it took her to get to the counter and back.

Stumbling across the room, she blindly swiped at the tears in her eyes. She bit down hard on her lip. Damn! She wasn't the crying sort and blubbing like an infant wasn't going to change anything. Although, come to think of it, what was?

For the first time in his life, Terry was well and truly on his own.

It's only six months, she repeated like a mantra, trying to reassure herself, *six months*, *six months*. But, hell, it didn't take six minutes, never mind six months, to wind up with a noose around your neck.

Lost in the horror, she bumped into the edge of another con's chair and almost fell.

'Careful, darling,' he said, extending a hand.

Quickly she snatched her arm away. 'Sorry.'

'No need to apologize.'

She might only have glanced at him, glanced and moved on, but there was something about his voice, its shifty provocative edge, that caught her attention. Eve raised her head and stared. A pair of dark assessing eyes returned her gaze before quite blatantly sliding down her body to view whatever else might be of interest.

'No point rushing,' he grinned sleazily into her breasts. 'I'm not going anywhere.'

She glared back at him. Great, this was just what she needed, some low-life piece of scum reviewing her assets in the middle of a prison visiting room. As if she didn't have enough to deal with. Spit in my face, why don't

you? At any other time, in any other place, she might have drawn her claws and prepared for a fight – but not today. She had more important things to worry about.

'Fuck you,' she murmured.

He laughed as she walked away.

Later, thinking back, she'd claim this was the moment that everything changed. But it wasn't entirely true. It was only while she was in the queue, grinding her teeth and quietly seething, that the idea slowly began to take form.

She bought tea and snacks, took a more circuitous route back to the table and clattered the tray down. As if he hadn't eaten for a week, Terry snatched up a bag of crisps and opened them.

'What's his name?' she asked, glancing over her shoulder.

'Who?'

'The one with the attitude, the one I bumped into.' She was sure Terry would have been watching her, probably trying to think of some yarn to spin, some tall story to get her off his back.

He hesitated again, his lips pursing to ask why, but then clearly thought better of it. This line of inquiry was preferable to her last. 'Cavelli,' he said. 'Martin Cavelli.'

'Yeah, I thought so. I thought it was him. Is he on your wing?'

He nodded.

'Did he do that to you?' she asked, gesturing towards the bruises on his face and neck.

'What?' He had just raised the plastic cup to his mouth. A stream of hot brown tea spluttered out across his chest. 'God, Evie, what—'

She didn't give him time to finish. 'Or have *anything* to do with it?'

'No!' he insisted, scowling and rubbing ineffectively at

the stain on his shirt. 'Shit, look what you've made me do. I'm going to have to wash this now.'

She sat back in her seat and smiled. Good. At least that was one question answered. Terry could lie for England – he was the quintessential blond-haired angel – but on this occasion she was certain he was telling the truth. Settling back to sip her tea, she sneaked a glance at the man called Cavelli, caught his eye and held it for a few lingering seconds.

She'd taken the opportunity for closer scrutiny while she was waiting to be served: an experienced con, she was sure, late forties, maybe a touch older, tall, broad, and with the kind of over-developed shoulders that came from too many hours in the gym. His dark hair streaked with silver was receding from his forehead, and his eyes, sharp and sly, were the shade of wet slate. But it was his mouth that she recalled most distinctly, the wide narrow lips that had mocked her, the mouth that was built to curse.

Yes, all things considered, he might not do too badly.

'Give him my number,' she said, 'ask him to ring me tonight after seven.'

Terry stared at her dumbfounded. 'What?'

'I need to talk to him.'

'Why? Why do you—'

'Because I know him,' she said, lowering her voice. 'I've met him before. Just tell him to call. He'll understand.'

It wasn't exactly a lie. Eve had met a hundred men like him before. At a glance she could spot those who were powerful and those who were not.

Terry frowned at her. 'How do you know him?'

She widened her grey eyes and smiled. 'It's a long story. But if you're prepared to tell me what happened to *you*, I might just consider . . .'

'Forget it,' he said.

She shrugged. ‘Fair enough.’

For the second time she gazed deliberately, almost seductively, over her shoulder.

The man called Cavelli glanced up again, his gaze hovering briefly on her face before slowly slipping down. He had that look in his eye: appraising – was that the word? Only something a little nastier than that.