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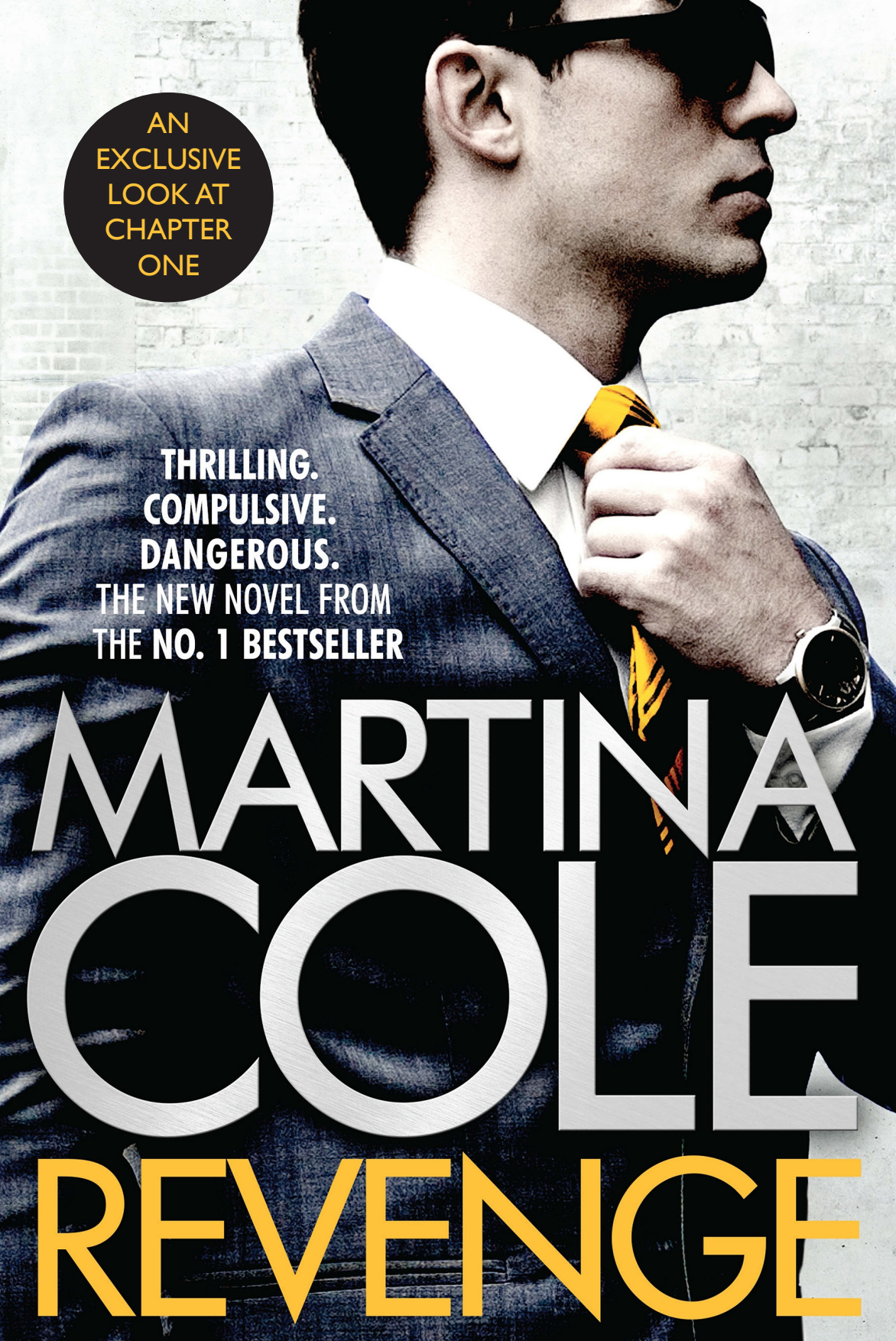
Revenge

Written by Martina Cole

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AN EXCLUSIVE LOOK AT CHAPTER ONE
THRILLING.
COMPULSIVE.
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THE NEW NOVEL FROM
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REVENGE

REVENGE

2012

'Hello! Are you not listening to me? My little girl has been missing for three *fucking* days. I think that might be worth your attention, don't you?'

Michael Flynn was so angry he was almost spitting his words down the phone. Over six feet tall and with a heavy build he was a big man and, as everyone in the room knew, he was more than capable of great violence. He was paying them for their expertise, which they currently seemed to be lacking in. In fact, they were irritating the arse off him with their stupidity.

'Her mother is giving me serious grief, and that alone is a fucking bugbear. I need to know where she is, people! So I think you lot had better get me the information I need before I start to think you're all mugging me off. I know she isn't exactly what you might call a wilting fucking violet and, believe me, when I locate her I will personally launch her into outer space for this. But I want her found. You are the *Filth* – this is what you fucking do! You locate errant fuckers. So you had better start doing it quickly. I am not a man who is known for his patience, and I have a very low threshold for idiocy.' He slammed down the telephone.

Jamie Gore listened to his boss rant at the policemen in his employ. Everyone knew that Jessie Flynn, Michael Flynn's

daughter, was about as dependable as a Nigerian marriage broker; therefore, she held no importance whatsoever to anyone, especially to the police. She could get away with anything – from possession of any substance, including a bomb, should she ever purchase one, and that was all thanks to her father's influence. He'd paid the Old Bill handsomely to *ignore* her over the years; now suddenly he wanted them to make her a priority? Bit of a turnaround there. He spoke up. 'Look, Michael, with all due respect, you know your daughter as well as we do, she could be fucking anywhere. She goes on the missing list regularly . . .'

Michael Flynn was dark-haired and dark-skinned, he had the Irish gypsy in him there was no doubt about that. He was a handsome fuck, and his good looks were part and parcel of his persona. Both men and women were attracted to him, and he had always used that to his advantage. His startling blue eyes were now trained on Jamie Gore, and the man felt the first prickle of uneasiness at the intensity of his gaze.

'You having a fucking laugh, Jamie? You think I brought you lot here for nothing? My old woman is like a fucking lunatic! My little Jessie is on the missing list! No one, and I mean *no one*, has seen her for *three fucking days*! I know she is a lazy mare, I know she lives on her own fucking time-zone, and I know she is the biggest pain in the rectum since records began. But she is still my baby girl. So my advice would be to fucking well find her! Track her down, let me know where she is so I can deliver her back to her mother and then we can go home.'

Michael looked around the room, and he knew that every bloke in there was thinking the same thing: Jessie Flynn was probably tucked up in bed with another lowlife, another fucking no-mark she had picked up on her travels. She was a trollop of the first water, having been sleeping with the enemy since she was fourteen years old. He wondered how many of his workforce

had serviced her at one time or another. She was a beautiful-looking girl, with the morals of a fucking alley cat. It didn't matter – he still wanted to know where she was. More to the point, her mother *needed* to know. Josephine was deeply concerned for her daughter's whereabouts.

Jessie was not a girl you could lose sleep worrying about all the time – she stumbled from one disaster to the next (usually the disaster was a man), but she always seemed to come out on top. He made sure of that. She came home at some point and then her mum would be so pleased to see her there would be no retribution of any kind. That was the trouble. Michael personally believed that his daughter needed a fucking good slap, but his wife would never agree. If Jessie murdered the neighbours with an axe and it was caught on CCTV, his wife would say, 'Well, they must have upset her.' Jessie could do no wrong in her eyes.

He too had indulged her once, when she had been small and still lovable, but that had changed the moment she discovered the power of her sexuality and the harm it could bring to the father she had once adored. He had given up trying to force any kind of fatherly rules or regulations on her. Jessie wouldn't listen to him anyway – she was a girl after his own heart in many respects. She did exactly what she wanted, and she did that with the maximum amount of energy she could muster. But she was a whore, and that fact broke his heart. Not that he could ever let that be known – in his game that would be seen as a weakness.

He sighed heavily. The men in this room were some of the hardest men in the south east; they *all* worked for him and were pleased to do so. He was a hard man, everyone knew that, but he prided himself on being a fair man, a decent man in some respects. These were men who were at the top of their particular games, and he used their nous and their instincts for his own ends – and made sure that they earned a good fucking wedge at the end of

the day. Michael Flynn was a one-off; in his world he was a man who was not only feared, but who had also earned the respect of his peers, and who had managed to rise to the top without treading on too many people's toes. He had embraced his partners in crime, and made sure that they earned enough to prevent them coveting what he had. Now he had the partnership and the major earn from every Face in the country – well, in Europe, if truth be told. And the men he dealt with owed him, respected him for his achievements, and did not begrudge him his percentage because, without him, most of them would never have got as far as they had. He had worked his way up the ladder, realising early on that to keep on top you had to have a loyal and willing workforce, and that if you wanted to earn a place of importance in the criminal world, you also needed a very lucrative and honestly run legitimate business, as well as the wherewithal to not only invest heavily in other people's businesses, but to also be able to offer them a modicum of protection should Lily Law decide to investigate them at any time.

Well, Michael basically owned Lily Law, and it was not fucking cheap. He paid out a serious fucking wedge to the Old Bill, and they, for their part, did fuck-all the majority of the time to earn their crusts. It was one of the things that really irritated him, but they were what his old partner Patrick Costello used to call a 'necessary evil'. He had worked hard to get them in his pocket, and many of them had *him* to thank for their additional wages, nice cars, and kids' educations. Because of that, he held all the major cards: he could negotiate a prison sentence, he could make certain charges disappear, he could fit up anyone who he felt was getting a bit too big for their boots. It was a win-win situation. No one had ever had that much power over the law before. He had orchestrated that by himself, and now he was a man who was settled at the top. No one in his game would ever

feel the urge, or indeed the need, to try and take his place and run his businesses. He was too shrewd for all that old fanny. His legit businesses were huge earners as well – he could explain away everything he owned. In short, Michael Flynn was virtually untouchable.

But now he was looking out at the men he knew as friends, not just as business associates, and he felt the prickle of shame wash over him. His daughter going AWOL was not something they saw as in their remit to sort but, as they were on his payroll, they had no option but to listen to him and offer their help in any way they could.

His Jessie's reputation had preceded her as always. They all assumed she was drugged and/or drunk out of her head somewhere, because that was what she was famous for. Twenty-two years old, and she was already a legend in her own lunchtime. She had been excluded from every school he sent her to, and instead she had embraced the underworld from an early age – from the drug dealers, to the scumbags who hung around the council estates, the burglars, gas-meter bandits with homemade tattoos – she spent her time in filthy squats until he brought her back home to her mother time and again. After cracking open a few heads, of course.

Michael had given up on her completely by the time she was sixteen. Once he had found her naked on a filthy mattress in a condemned house in Hackney with a junkie three times her age, who had given her not only a black eye but a dose of gonorrhoea as well. He had known then that he had no choice but to step away from her emotionally. He loved her, but he could not get through to her. Nevertheless, he had gone back and almost kicked the man to death for doing that to his baby. He had vented his anger, looking around at how she had been living. She was available to any man who tipped her the wink and who

she thought would anger her father, and bring him shame.

He didn't understand it. She had had a home that was not only full of love for her, but was beautiful. She had everything she could have desired: the chance to go to a good school, and a good life ahead of her. But, from fourteen years of age, she had made it her business to find the lowest of the low, and make a home there for herself with them, and she had broken her mother's heart in the process. Unlike her father, her mother still felt her daughter could turn her life around, redeem herself. But Michael refused to get involved any more; she was his Achilles heel, his only real weakness. Her antics were common knowledge in his world, and it was only his status that stopped people from gossiping openly about her.

He had tried everything, and she had fought him every step of the way. She was his daughter, and he would protect her as much as he could but, in his darkest moments, when he heard about her latest escapades, or the police informed him she had been arrested once more, he had wished her dead, and he hated himself for that.

Seeing the suffering she caused his wife made him resent Jessie all the more. Jessie had broken her mother early on. She still cared what happened to her daughter; she hoped that she would come home one day, and it would be forgotten, and they would live a normal life together, like everyone else. Michael knew better. He just provided Jessie with the means to live her life, but at least her need of money allowed him to police her in some ways.

Jessie had given birth to a child at sixteen, but the child was no more to her than a doll she dressed up on special occasions. She left him to be brought up by her own mother. Michael loved the bones of his handsome little grandson, who had more of the Flynn family in him than whoever had been the fucking piece-of-dirt culprit. Not that Jessie had any fucking idea of her son's

parentage of course; the poor child had been no more than a whodunnit and, with Jessie, that meant it could have been literally *anyone*. Oh, he'd accepted the reality of his Jessie a long time ago. He loved her, but he didn't *like* her one bit.

Now her mother was worried about her and, if he was really honest with himself, so was he. He understood her much more than she had ever realised; she was a ponce of Olympian standards, but she had never missed an opportunity to pick up her allowance. She should have been at his offices the night before to pick up the money, but she had been a no-show. That was not like his daughter at all – she craved money like a junkie craved a fix. She spent like a woman with no fucking arms – on clothes, shoes and, unfortunately, men. His Jessie never missed her cash payment; she had her credit cards as well, but he could monitor them, so she knew the value of a pound. Jessie was a druggie, a drunk and a waste of space, but she was never late for her allowance. He made sure that it was far too lucrative for her to turn down.

So where the fuck was she?

Jessie Flynn opened her eyes, and fear enveloped her.

It was pitch dark, and she was aware that she was bound, both her hands and her feet tied. For all her exploits, she had never found herself in a predicament like this. She was racking her brains to work out not only who the fuck she had upset recently, but who would have the guts to do this to her knowing who her father was. She knew, on one level, she was in serious trouble, but she was still having a problem accepting that.

She was Jessie *Flynn*, for fuck's sake! Her dad was the biggest Face in town. That had always meant she was immune to aggravation of any kind – even when she caused outrageous problems for herself, those problems were automatically negated by her father's timely intervention.

She strained her eyes to see where she was being held captive, but the darkness was total. There was nothing to see at all – just a pure blackness. She was actually truly frightened, and that shocked her. She had never felt real fear before – it was an alien concept – and she swallowed down the scream that she could feel building inside her throat. She would never let anyone know that she was scared or worried about anything. All her life she had lived behind a mask of defiance, and she was not going to let this situation freak her out.

She took a few deep breaths to calm herself; her heart was hammering in her ears, and she could hear it so loudly it was like a drum beating in the room. It bothered her more than she liked to admit. It was too quiet, that was the problem; there was no sound other than her own breathing, her own heartbeat.

Instinctively, she knew that was not a good sign. This was not a situation that she could interpret or make any sense of. She was not unused to waking up somewhere strange, without any memory whatsoever of how she had arrived there. She would often see a man asleep beside her and have no idea who he was or where she had come across him. But she would find out eventually; she would talk to them and gradually she would get the gist of how she had arrived in their bed and, somewhere in the back of her mind, she would dredge up something to explain the events of the night in question.

This was different. She was tied up and she was in pain. Her arms felt like they were being wrenched from their sockets, and her ankles were tied so tightly she couldn't feel her feet.

She felt the fear rising inside her once again, and she fought it down; whoever had done this to her would never get the satisfaction of hearing her cry out into the darkness, or calling for help. She was shrewd enough to know that, wherever she was, crying out for help would be futile. If there was any

chance of being heard her mouth would have been taped shut. The silence around her was complete, like the darkness; she was not somewhere random passers-by would stumble across, let alone somewhere that noise would cause people to panic or phone the Filth. She was being held captive for some reason – she just hoped that the reason would be explained to her sooner rather than later.

She was cold, and she could smell the mustiness of the mattress she was lying on – the place was damp, so she could even be underground. The silence and the stench made her think that might be the case. She knew, deep in her guts, that she was not here for any reason that might benefit her.

She closed her eyes tightly because, once more, she was feeling the urge to shout her lungs out, however futile. She needed to use the toilet, she felt a sudden urge to open her bowels; she was coming down fast, and she could feel it. She had not eaten properly for a few days and, now that she was sobering up, she was becoming even more afraid of the dangerous predicament she found herself in. She tried to bring her hands out from behind her back, but she couldn't. They were tied together so tightly, every movement caused a burning pain. It occurred to her suddenly that she was still fully clothed, so whoever had done this to her did not seem to have touched her in a sexual way. She was not sure that was a good thing either – that would have been something she could understand, could even control. Everything in her life until now had been about using her feminine wiles to get what she wanted.

She took a few more deep breaths, but the panic lingered close to the surface. She closed her eyes tightly and tried to relax her body, but it was hard. Her arms were screaming now; she had probably been tied up for a good few hours, and her trying to move around was causing the pain. She tried to wiggle her

fingers – a voice in her head was telling her to keep the circulation going. Tears formed in her eyes, and she blinked them away furiously. She was not going to show her fear to anyone, that was simply not in her make up.

This had to be a kidnapping. The thought gave her a thrill of anticipation – if that was the case then her dad would pay them and that would be it. Though she also knew her dad would never rest till he had tracked them down – not for taking her hostage, of course, but for trying to have him over. She suspected he wouldn't actually bother to pay them if it was left up to him – it was her mum who would insist. Her mum was all he cared about really, and his grandson, of course. Her son was the only saving grace Jessie had; her dad couldn't control her life, so he was determined to control his grandson's. He loved him though. She saw that, and it hurt her.

She managed to turn over on to her belly, and that eased the pain in her shoulders. She had never in her life felt so vulnerable or so alone, and she was craving a drink. Not water – though even that would be welcome. No, she was craving a real drink. She needed a large vodka or a Scotch, just something to take the edge off. Valium at least would help her relax and work out what she was going to do. It occurred to her that for the first time in years she was stone-cold sober, without the crutch of either chemicals or alcohol.

She heard the scraping sound of a heavy door opening somewhere in the distance outside the room where she was tied up like a kipper, and she felt the unmistakable prickle of genuine terror.

Detective Inspector Timothy Branch of the Serious Crime Squad was annoyed even though he had always known that this day would come. He was not a fool – no matter what Michael Flynn

might think. He had been aware from the first moment he had taken the man's money that he was, to all intents and purposes, now owned by him. He would be called on at some point to repay the favour; he had just not expected it to come so fucking soon. In fairness, this actually was a police matter – a missing daughter was not something to take lightly. He shouldn't feel so angry about being summoned into his offices by Flynn, or about the man demanding, in a loud and threatening manner, that he wanted results.

'Take the opportunity to earn your fucking keep, you useless fucking ponce!'

That hurt. Timothy knew when he was being taken for a cunt, and the man he was dealing with was not someone who could be palmed off with legal jargon, more's the pity. He knew he had to deliver, and deliver sooner rather than later.

Michael Flynn was like a man demented. 'She disappeared three days ago, Branch, and I have it on good authority that she was last seen in a pub in Upney. She scored some coke and grass, and she left around midnight, and no one has seen her since.'

Timothy Branch nodded, as if he was in full accord with everything he was hearing. His carefully modulated pseudo-posh voice was like a red rag to a bull, though he wasn't aware of that just yet. He was a snob, and a social-climbing arsewipe who had no qualms about taking money on the side to bankroll his wife's pretentious upper-middle-class lifestyle, and who had believed that his expertise would never be compromised by his association with a known villain. His stupidity and his arrogance were exactly the reasons why he was on Michael's payroll in the first place; without someone like Flynn on his side, he had no chance of hitting the big time.

'I will put out a missing persons report, Michael, but, in all

honesty, she will probably turn up as per usual, we both know that.'

Michael looked at the man he had been paying handsomely for so long, and it occurred to him that he had been paying out a decent wedge to a complete fucking moron. Timothy *had* to have known that at some point he would be called on to deliver, that the day would come when he would be asked to do a favour of some description. Now he was being asked to do something that he should be doing *anyway* – look for a missing girl – but he was not really demonstrating the level of motivation that Michael's regular payments should have guaranteed. In fact, he was not showing the least bit of willing, and that alone was irritating. He was showing no consideration of how much he had pocketed over the last few years, or how his rise through the ranks of the police force had been orchestrated by the same man he was now attempting to mug off.

Michael Flynn was not in the mood for this kind of aggravation; the last few hours had been a revelation to him as to how deeply his daughter and her fucking lifestyle had impacted on him personally. He was now being treated like a fucking tourist by a no-mark who relied on him for a second wage, and that was not something he could allow. 'You useless fucking cunt! All the money I have slipped your way, and you treat me like a fucking greebo! Like a fucking no one!' He dragged the terrified man from his chair, savouring his fear, and his dawning comprehension of exactly who he was dealing with. 'I expect the best, because that is what I have paid for over the years, and you are two seconds away from making me regret my decision to put you on my payroll. A decision that I can easily rectify – and that, my friend, would of course mean that you would have to return every penny I fucking shoved your way over the years. You avaricious useless fucking ponce! I hate dishonest Old Bill more than anything. If I ever get a capture it had better be from one I

couldn't buy off. That's an honest nicking, you see, and I could swallow that. But Filth like you are only there to do what I fucking request of them.'

Timothy Branch lay on the floor of his own office, with his arms over his head to protect himself from another onslaught from Michael Flynn. He was well aware that everyone in the station could hear the conversation and would know exactly what was going on. He was waiting for the beating that he was convinced was going to come. He had made a mistake of Olympian standards, and he could not rectify the situation because he had brought it on himself. He had honestly believed that being a policeman, a *senior* policeman, would have guaranteed him immunity from this sort of behaviour. He had assumed that Flynn, for all his money and reputation, would have thought long and hard before he raised his hand to a member of the police force. But he had been very wrong. Flynn's power went far deeper than he had ever anticipated. The fact that no one had come to his aid was a real lesson for Timothy Branch. The outer offices were now deathly quiet; everyone out there was listening to this exchange and he knew his humiliation was now complete.

Then the office door opened with a bang, and Chief Superintendent Dennis Farthing came into the room like an avenging angel, all cigarette smoke and false teeth. Timothy Branch felt relief washing over him, until he heard the man say with mock sincerity, 'A sorry business this, Michael, but don't you worry, my friend – I will have my best men on it, of that you can be assured. Jessie is a priority, I guarantee.'

Michael Flynn felt the anger seeping out of him. This was what he wanted – a promise that everything that could be done to find his daughter was being done. His wife needed that, she needed to know that Jessie was being treated as a priority, that he was using his considerable power to locate her child. But,

deep down in his gut, he knew that something was not right, that this was far more serious than anyone really thought. Jessie never missed a pay day, and she never went twenty-four hours without ringing her mother. Even drugged out of her brains, she still rang her mum for a chat, because she knew that if she didn't get in touch Josephine would worry herself sick. Jessie knew that her mum needed to hear from her, that she wasn't a well woman in her own way. It was Jessie's only real saving grace that she rarely let a day go by without a call to her mum.

Now it was almost four days since anyone had seen or heard from her. If Michael was honest, he was feeling more uneasy by the hour.

Josephine Flynn was having trouble breathing. It was a warning before she got one of her panic attacks, so she sat down in her chair and tried to regulate her breaths. She hated herself for her weakness, but she had always suffered with her nerves. She could feel her heartbeat slowing down, and she closed her eyes in relief.

She savoured the calmness that washed over her, the feeling of normality and the knowledge that she had conquered her demons, if only for a little while. She opened her eyes slowly, and looked around sadly; she knew she should motivate herself, tidy up, *do* something constructive. But she wouldn't because she never did. No matter how many times she convinced herself that she was ready to finally do it, to finally take control of her life and her surroundings, when it came to the crunch, she *never* did anything that made a real difference.

She noticed that the curtains were open; Michael must have snuck in and opened them while she was sleeping. She knew that if he had not opened them she wouldn't have bothered. She liked them closed, she liked to shut out the world, the *real* world. Michael always argued that they had such wonderful views – all

farmland and no other houses in sight. He thought that would make her feel better, make her feel easier in herself. But he didn't understand that the view outside the windows was irrelevant, she had no interest in it whatsoever. She had no real interest in anything other than her immediate surroundings.

She got up slowly, and went to her dressing table. Michael had left her a pitcher of fresh water, and she smiled at his kindness. She poured a glass out for herself, and then she meticulously counted out her medication. She swallowed the pills quickly, comforted by the feel of them in her mouth as she forced them inside her with huge gulps of the fresh water her husband knew she needed. She felt better immediately; she had taken her first step into the day, a day that was as fraught for her as every other day in her life.

She went back to her chair, and settled herself down again. Everywhere she looked was cluttered – piles of photographs, newspapers, or used jars. Shoes were piled in the corners, and her clothes were strewn all over the floor. Rubbish was kept in bin bags, and she had placed them lovingly against the walls. The clutter was her armour against the world – it made her feel safe. She could look at something that she had kept for reasons known only to herself, and she could smile in remembrance of a memory long gone – a memory no one cared about but her.

Now her Jessie was gone. No word at all, and Josephine knew in her gut that something bad had happened to her daughter.

She opened up her make-up bags which were never far from her side and, pulling a large mirror towards her, she began the long and painstaking artistry she used to create the image that allowed her to face the world as best she could.

Michael Flynn was tired. He had not slept properly for two days and, even though he had not believed it possible, he was deeply

concerned for his daughter's safety. She was selfish, greedy, manipulative and devoid of any real morals, and that was exactly why she never failed to turn up for her allowance. She had very expensive tastes, and she liked to be able to indulge herself; she wasn't as low rent as she made out.

She was never off his radar no matter what anyone else might think or what he might let them think. She was always going to be his baby. She was a girl who made it very difficult to love her, who knew exactly how to rattle his cage. It was something she had made her mission in life; hurting him was something she enjoyed so much she had even left her own son behind in her pursuit of his unhappiness. He had taken on responsibility for the child along with his wife although, to his daughter's chagrin, it had not been a chore for them. In fact, it had been almost like a rebirth for them both, inasmuch as they had adored their grandson from the moment he had entered the world. Jessie, on the other hand, had not been miraculously changed by giving birth to her own flesh and blood, as her mother had been convinced would be the case. Instead she had abandoned her little son at the first available opportunity, and she had drifted in and out of his life ever since. Michael hated her for that, even more than he hated her for how much she had hurt her poor mother.

Jessie thought she herself was the only person worth a day's interest. But that was his daughter – an arrogant fucker, who had no moral compass whatsoever. She saw everyone around her as someone to be used for her own ends, and that included her own child, her own flesh and blood. Michael had been forced to accept that about her over the last few years and it had not been as easy as everyone had believed. It had been very hard for him. Because he had loved her with a vengeance. She was his baby girl, his only child. She was also a selfish, vicious, bitter, manipula-

tive, avaricious, devious, two-faced ponce, whose only interest in life seemed to be getting drunk, drugged, laid, or a combination of all three. She had been the apple of his eye once, and now she was someone he had to live down on a daily basis. It was only his standing that stopped him from hearing the real gossip concerning her, and he knew that was a good thing because if she pushed him too far, he knew he might finally do something to get himself nicked.

He was staring at the phones in his office, hoping that whoever had her would just ring him up and let him know she was OK. Then, once he had paid them off, and his Jessie was accounted for, he would hunt the bastards down like the fucking rabid dogs they were, and personally make sure that they never again put any other parents through such agony. He would take great pleasure in ensuring they disappeared from the world around them in as much pain and terror as physically possible.

He was taking his daughter's disappearance personally; whoever was behind it was trying to prove a point. This was about him. It had to be. Inside his head, he could not help wondering if his daughter was a part of it all. She was capable of anything, as he knew better than anyone. But he hoped that he was wrong. For all that had happened, he hated to think she was capable of trying to rip him off and, if she *was* trying to do that, he would personally make sure that everyone involved would be made aware of how irritated their actions had made him, his Jessie especially. If she *was* involved, that would be the last straw, and he would have to take drastic action against her.

There were some things that could never be forgiven. Some things that could finally cause a body to turn on their own.

Jessie woke up once more, and she was immediately aware that there was somebody else in the room with her.

It was still pitch dark. Still cold and damp. She knew that she couldn't be the first to speak – her dad had always told her: when in doubt, shut your trap. If you kept your own counsel, eventually the others would feel the need to explain themselves, and he had been right. She had learnt that the hard way. So she didn't say a word.

She could hear the shallow breathing of whoever was now in the room with her and, more to the point, she knew that they could also hear her breathing. They would know that she wasn't asleep any more. She was very much awake. It was a terrifying experience. She had never once, in her whole life, needed to worry about someone else's reactions to her or her antics. No matter what had happened to her, no matter what she had said or done, she had always known that her father would be in the background, and the reason why she would ultimately be safe no matter what she did. No one was willing to confront her because that would mean they would have to deal with *him*. That was something no one in their right mind would even consider. It was her get-out-of-jail-free card, the reason she pushed everything as far as she could. It was why she had been able to fuck her father over again and again. He had always made sure that she was untouchable. She had thought she was invincible because of her father – it was something she relied on. No matter what she did, no matter how much trouble she had landed herself in, her father had always made sure that it had all gone away. It was something she had seen as another of his weaknesses, as another reason to do whatever she wanted. After all, no matter what she did, he bailed her out. He made sure that her actions did not infringe on his lifestyle in any way and that was what it was all about. She knew his reputation was everything to him. Well, she was his daughter, his only child, and she had made damn sure that his reputation as a parent was worth nothing. She had

enjoyed that, enjoyed the knowledge that her actions had undermined him, and made him see that he was not worth anything really.

But now she didn't know what to think. She would have to play this one by ear. She was in serious trouble. Whoever was behind this was not someone who cared about her or her family name.

She was so scared. She wasn't alone in this darkness, and she knew that she wasn't going anywhere anytime soon.

Josephine Flynn looked at her little grandson and smiled. He was beautiful – dark-haired and blue-eyed – his grandfather's double. He even had Michael's mannerisms. It was uncanny considering Jessie had no idea who had fathered him. Josephine believed that Michael's genes were so strong they had cancelled out any that the culprit contributed. She hoped so, for the child's sake; his father could be anybody – that was the honest truth. Jessie had only had the child because an abortion was out of the question as far as her father was concerned. It was also the only thing that would make her mother turn against her daughter. Still, Josephine liked to think, in her lighter moments, that her daughter wouldn't have been capable of doing something so heinous.

Jessie knew how she had struggled to have *her*. She had lost all her other children – some even after Jessie's birth. A child, Josephine believed, was God's gift, and to refuse such a wonderful offering was beyond forgiveness. So Jessie had calmed down, stopped her drinking and drug-taking for a while, and she had brought this handsome gorgeous boy into the world. Jessie had then walked out of her own child's world when he was two days old; she had given him over to her parents without a backward glance. That had hurt Josephine more than anything else her

daughter had done, even if she was happy to take him on. Jessie had only been sixteen, and Josephine had hoped that giving birth might have made her daughter grow up, start to understand that all actions had their own set of consequences. But she had been wrong, very wrong – if anything, it had just made her daughter worse.

Jessie had not even bothered to name her own child, and that, for Josephine, summed up the whole situation. So she had named him herself – Jake – and Jessie had not voiced an opinion either way.

Jake was six years old now, but he wore clothes for an eight year old. He was bright as a button, already reading and writing well beyond his years, and showing every sign of being academic. Well, he had not inherited that from his mother! Jessie had always been a poor student – not because she wasn't clever, but because she was lazy. Jessie had always taken the path of least resistance. Josephine blamed herself; they had waited so long for Jessie to come along, and she had ruined her from day one. She regretted that now. Her mother had been right all those years ago. She had warned her that Jessie was a girl who needed to be chastised, who had a strong will that needed to be curbed.

Michael, in fairness, had allowed her free rein with Jessie's upbringing. He had never forced his own opinions on her where the child was concerned, even when she had known he had every right to call the shots. Michael loved her too much – he always conceded to her and her wants. He adored her, and she loved him all the more for that, because she knew that her problems would have made a lesser man run away as fast as his legs would carry him. But her Michael had never once made her feel anything other than cared for and cherished.

She watched as her grandson looked around her cluttered bedroom, and she waited for what she knew was coming.

'It's very dark in here, Nana. Why don't you come into the garden with me? You could push me on my swing if you liked.' The hope was in his voice, as always.

Josephine smiled sadly. 'That's what we have Dana for, Jake. She's much younger than Nana and she can run after you. How about after your swing, we have dinner with Granddad, and then we can all play a game together?'

Jake Flynn shrugged; it was no more than he had expected. 'OK. Will my mummy be coming to see me soon?'

It was a loaded question, and one he asked occasionally when he remembered he had a mummy. Josephine swallowed down the sadness inside her as she answered him brightly, 'You'll see her soon. You know that she is *very* busy. But as soon as she gets some time off from work, she will come straight here to see you.'

Dana O'Carroll was a good nanny – she knew when to intervene and, grabbing the child's hand, she said loudly in her thick Irish brogue, 'Come on now, Jake, let's go and play, shall we? Your nana needs to sort out a few things.'

Josephine watched them as they left the room, and she closed her eyes in distress. Pulling herself from her chair, she looked at herself in the full-length mirror that Michael had bought for her all the way from France. It was very old, and had cost a small fortune. She loved it. She saw a very beautiful woman, well dressed with perfect make-up, and sad green eyes. She didn't look her age, and her figure was still to be envied. Her thick blond hair had to be coloured now; a girl came every month and saw to that, her nails, and her waxing. She had always been a woman who had looked after herself in that respect. She suspected she could still turn a few heads – that's if she ever left the house, of course – and she knew that Michael was proud of her. He had always made her feel like the only woman in the world, and he still treated her like a queen.

If only Jessie had tried to understand him, meet him halfway even, she knew they would not be in this situation. But Jessie always had to have the last word, and had understood that, because of her mother's problems, she had the upper hand. Jessie hated that her mother's world was so small, and she blamed her father for everything that had happened. No matter how hard Josephine had tried to explain the truth, Jessie had not believed her. Now she was terrified that her daughter had taken up with someone who had harmed her, hurt her little girl in some way.

Jessie had a knack for finding that type of person – men who used her, who treated her like she was nothing and discarded her without a backward glance. Men who she sought out, and who she paid for, bankrolled with her father's money, and who she knew would make him angry because she was throwing her life away just to hurt him. Now, it seemed she had finally picked the wrong one – a man who she couldn't control.

It had been too long. Her Jessie never went a day without talking to her – whatever she thought about her father, she loved her mother. They were very close, and it was only the knowledge that she would find it hard if she didn't see or hear from her little girl, that had stopped Michael from sidelining his Jessie for good. He felt it would do her good to have to earn her own keep, and see what the world was like without his name to protect her; Josephine had argued that if he did that she would be in danger of losing her altogether. Her real fear was that Jessie would end up on the streets, selling herself to whoever for enough money to get stoned. Now she wondered if he had been right all along, and a short, sharp shock, as he put it, might have done Jessie some good.

She picked up her favourite rosary. It had been a present from Michael on their wedding day – it was not expensive, it was very plain, made from olive wood, but it meant the world to her.

She kissed the Cross of Christ, and blessed herself quickly. Then she walked from her bedroom into her large sitting room. There she knelt down before the crucifix that dominated the room, and she began the first decade of the rosary. She normally enjoyed the Joyful Mysteries but, since Jessie's disappearance, she was now concentrating on the Sorrowful Mysteries. She could feel the despair that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, must have felt when her son had been taken from her. All she wanted, all she was praying for, was a phone call. Just something to let her know her daughter was safe.

'Is he fucking sure? How are we supposed to plot his daughter's last movements? I mean, in all honesty, where would we start? She could have been literally anywhere.' Marcus Dewer was genuinely perplexed. He was also feeling worried – like many of Michael's workforce, he was guilty of having known Jessie Flynn in a biblical sense. If he was honest, on more than one occasion. Now she was on the missing list, and he was terrified that Michael would find that out. Like most people, he believed she was on the nest somewhere, drugged out of her brains and oblivious to all the aggro she was causing.

Jamie Gore shrugged. 'It is what it is, Marcus. She likes this part of Brixton because she can score here. So let's get parked, and start asking round.'

Marcus sighed, and parked the BMW neatly. He looked at the photo of Jessie; she was a pretty girl, there was no doubt about that.

'This is fucking stupid! Everyone knows there's a price for information on her. The whole of the Metropolitan Police are scouring the Smoke. So what we are supposed to find out I don't know.'

Jamie Gore secretly agreed with his friend, but he was too

shrewd to say that. 'Marcus, do me a favour, will you? Shut the fuck up, and do what the man is paying us for. Who knows – we might stumble on to something accidentally. In fact, I think we should poke our heads into a few skag houses. You know what junkies are like – the fucking Third World War could erupt and they wouldn't even notice until they ran out of heroin. So there's a chance, albeit a very slim one, that they might not know about her being missing. And don't forget, Marcus, if we find out something important, we will be greatly rewarded.'

Marcus nodded, but he wasn't convinced. He was more worried that they would be the ones to find her, overdosed and dead as a doornail. *That* wasn't the kind of news he would relish giving Michael. It was what the majority of people believed had happened to Jessie Flynn – they were waiting for her body to turn up, and no one wanted to be the one who found it.

Jessie was weak. The man who was holding her only gave her the minimum of water; she was always thirsty, although the hunger wasn't so acute any more. She couldn't work out how long she had been down here in the darkness. She seemed to sleep a lot, so she guessed that he was putting something in the water to keep her sedated. At least he had untied her hands although she was still manacled around her ankles, and the chain was attached to an iron hoop on the wall behind the mattress. She was still in darkness – the only time there was any light was when he brought her water. He had a torch, but it blinded her, so she covered her eyes. She had a feeling he wasn't interested in her seeing him anyway. She played the game – that was all she could do.

He had still not spoken to her, and that frightened her more than anything else. She had threatened him, abused him,

told him that her father would be searching for her, and he had not reacted in any way. He had shone the torch and shown her an old chamber pot where he expected her to do her business. She had railed at him, cursed him, but there had been no reaction.

She had woken up earlier because she could hear him moving around outside the door. She swallowed down the rising panic that was getting harder and harder to control. She didn't know what she was supposed to do, what he wanted from her. She could smell her own faeces, could feel the dirtiness of her body and clothes. She had waited for him to rape her, or assault her, but he had done nothing. He brought her some water at regular intervals, and he emptied the chamber pot at some point, and he had also left her a blanket. She could only assume he had kidnapped her, and he was waiting for her father to pay the money. He would pay it – her mother would make sure of that. But why was it taking so long?

She kept thinking of every serial-killer film she had ever watched, every book she had ever read about men who abducted young women, and tortured and raped them. Only in the books and the films, there was always a detective on their trail who you knew would eventually save the girl and kill the maniac; you knew that because the detective *always* solved his case no matter how obscure the clues. The maniac would also often be in direct contact with the police, would be taunting them and, as the reader or viewer, you would be cheering on the detective, knowing all along that he or she would eventually work it out. But that was not real life. She worried that he was going to come in at some point and really hurt her, and she was so terrified about that.

Her initial arrogance was gone; she was not only stone cold sober for the first time in years, she was also acutely aware that

she wasn't ready to die. She loved her son in her own way, and she wanted to see him again, see her mum, be hugged by her once more. She had to wonder if this was something to do with her dad – he had stepped on a lot of people's toes. Surely she should have been out by now if it was about money? What if this man was holding her as a grudge against her father? Or what if he was a serial killer and her father's name and reputation meant nothing to him?

She pushed her fist into her mouth to stop herself from screaming; she still had enough strength left to make sure she didn't show him her fear. She wouldn't show him how scared she was until she absolutely had to. She would beg him on her knees if that was what he wanted, she would do whatever she needed to try and get herself out of this situation.

She pulled the blanket around her, and she forced herself to try and think rationally. But it was hard to concentrate – the darkness was so intimidating, so final. And the man who held her was still an enigma. Until he spoke to her or acknowledged her presence in some way, she knew she couldn't even begin to understand exactly what she was dealing with. She felt the tears running down her face, and she didn't even try to stop them.

'Come on, Jake, eat your dinner up.'

Michael winked at his grandson, as always amazed at the love the child could engender in him. Considering the circumstances of his birth, Michael had always been in awe of the feelings he had for this child.

'I'm eating my dinner, Granddad, so I can grow up big and strong like you.'

Michael sighed. He remembered when his Jessie had been like this little lad, innocent, trusting and eager for her parents' company. All that had changed when she was thirteen. Overnight

she had become a different person – difficult, awkward, full of hate. Everyone said it was teenage angst, that she would grow out of it. But she hadn't, she had gradually got worse, and she had become out of control. Now she was missing, and he didn't know what more he could do.

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