

Opening extract from
**A Dangerous
Man**

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A Dangerous Man extract

Chapter One

February - The Beginning

Late as usual, I'd clattered along the magnolia hallway of our overcrowded flat, finding Paul still in the kitchen. He gave me a dirty grin from next to the dishwasher, which wasn't surprising since I'd spent a couple of hours the previous night giving him a good time. I'd then spent fifteen minutes that morning trying to shower the smell of it off my skin. Not one of my best decisions ever, but it kept the rent low. Joe, our landlord and Paul's lover, wasn't there, of course. He was out wheeling and dealing with a load of artie types in Italy, lucky bastard, but if he knew what went on he'd ... he'd ... well, I didn't know what he'd do but it wouldn't be good.

'Hey there, Mikey. How's tricks?' Paul stood up, his gut swelling the belt of his chinos, and his round face lined with sweat in spite of the cold. Looking at him made me glad for my own slim build and narrow features, not to mention my full head of dark hair compared to his receding hairline.

'Okay.'

He gazed at me for a moment as if expecting something else, but I'd never been much of a one for chatting to men I'd slept with. Besides, I hated being called Mikey. It reminded me of home, but I wouldn't tell him that. It might give him too much power.

'Enjoy last night then?' he said at last, pulling at his ear-lobe.

I shrugged, 'Sure. It was fine.'

'More than fine, don't you think? That's understating it, isn't it? It was bloody marvellous and you know it.'

It was far too early in the day to cope with enthusiasm and, in any case, it hadn't set my blood on fire. Paul's repertoire of sexual moves could be counted as less than the colours in the rainbow and like the rainbow they were always in the same order.

'Yeah,' he went on as the sound of kids yelling burst in from the street outside.

'The thing about you is you're so bloody good at it. God knows where you learn that stuff from. Do you know what?'

With his last question, he faced me, his grin turning sly.

'What?' I said, though I wasn't interested in the answer.

'You've done this before, haven't you?'

I laughed. What had he thought? That I'd never done it at all? That one glimpse of the solid flesh and wispy black hair of my fellow lodger had swept me over the edge into sexual activity? 'Sure, yeah, I was Mr Catholic Priest when I turned up here.'

'No, not like that, Mikey,' he folded his arms and pursed his lips. 'I mean for money. You've done this before for money, haven't you?'

'Don't be stupid. I don't do it for money with you.'

'You call paying less rent to Joe because I'm paying the extra not doing it for cash?'

No, I didn't as a matter of fact. Paul may have thought he was making me into a real-life rent boy in downtown Hackney, if you could call a twenty-four year old a boy, but it didn't count until you held the notes in your fist. Everyone knew that. But still, there were streets where I lived, and beyond, the East End for one, maybe Soho on a good day, which knew the shape of my stride and the colour of my flesh.

'Mikey?' Paul prompted.

'Just leave it.'

'Getting too close, am I?'

This was stupid so I turned to go, but with a sudden shift in mood, which I should have been used to, he grabbed my arm so hard I almost cried out.

'Cut the crap,' he whispered dangerously close to my ear so that the air around us crackled. 'I know what you've been up to, I hear rumours ...'

'What? In those bars you go to?'

He twisted my arm again. 'Shut up. I think you should be more careful, you know. Joe wouldn't like knowing how you make your money when you can't sell that bloody art of yours – if art's what you call it. Scribbling's more the word, isn't it? Anyway, you'd be out of here faster than you could say Picasso. Maybe you should be even nicer to me just to make sure you don't end up on the streets, Mikey. For real.'

And with a final twist of my arm which made it feel as if it might burn for ever, he shoved me away, set the dishwasher to start and swaggered out of the kitchen.

I sat down. My blood was drumming in my head and I had to take several deep breaths to stifle the feeling of wanting to be sick, all the while listening to the sound of the shower being turned on and Paul's usual tuneless singing. I'd only been here six months but all the signs said it was time to go. But where? I knew nobody and each time I did a flit, the next flatshare was always worse than the last. In some way or other. At least Joe's place was clean, though the company he kept did nothing for me. The thought of being "nicer" to Paul didn't fill me with any great happiness and anyway what he'd accused me of was unfair. Sometimes I needed cash, and sex was the best way to get it. It didn't make me a hooker. Just someone wanting to survive. Maybe I'd have to be more careful next time.