



A Pound of Flesh

By Sophie Jackson

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Orange Is the New Black meets Jennifer Probst's *New York Times* bestselling Marriage to a Billionaire trilogy, featuring a strong-minded prison tutor who discovers that her sexy bad-boy student is far more than he appears to be.

Haunted by nightmares of her father's street murder fifteen years ago, Kat Lane decides to face her fears and uphold his legacy of helping others by teaching inmates at a New York prison. There she meets arrogant Wesley Carter, who's as handsome as he is dangerous, as mysterious as he is quick-witted, and with a reputation that ensures people will keep their distance.

As teacher and student, Kat and Carter are forced to leave their animosities at the door and learn that one should never judge a book by its cover. As Carter's barriers begin to crumble, Kat realizes there's much more to her angry student than she thought, leaving them to face a new, perilous obstacle: their undeniable attraction to one another.

When Carter is released and Kat continues to tutor him on the outside, the obstacles mount. Can they fight the odds to make their relationship work? Will Kat's family and friends ever accept her being with someone of his background? And will Kat's discovery of Carter's role on the night her father died force them apart forever...or unite them?

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Editorial Review

Review

“An intriguing tale of acceptance and finding love in unexpected circumstances.” (J.M. Darhower author of *Sempre*)

A Pound of Flesh is an intriguing tale of acceptance, and understanding, and finding love in unexpected circumstances. What sets it apart from others is the way Sophie weaves storylines to build suspense before everything ultimately comes together, leaving the reader guessing and gasping until the very end.” (J.M. Darhower, author of *Sempre*)

“[Sophie] writes the type of stories today's reader wants: beautifully created characters filled with emotion, and a storyline that sticks with you long after you turn the last page.” (Tara Sue Me, New York Times bestselling author of the *Submissive* series)

About the Author

Sophie Jackson writes fanfiction under the online handle Jaxon22. She is the author of the award-winning *A Pound of Flesh* series, including the e-novellas *Love and Always* and *Fate and Forever*. Follow her on Twitter: @SophieJax

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A Pound of Flesh

Wesley James Carter, Arthur Kill Correctional Facility inmate and all-around punk, smirked at the disgruntled prison guard who'd been demanding his prison number for the past ten minutes. To say that Carter's insolent behavior and amused expression were agitating the overweight, balding man would be an understatement. Dude was nearly foaming at the mouth.

It was Friday, and five minutes after the guard had clocked out.

All the more reason for Carter to be a difficult bastard.

The guard ran an impatient hand over the back of his plump neck and his tired eyes narrowed. "Listen," he warned in a low, dangerous voice that no doubt worked like a knife to the throats of other inmates. "It's very simple. You give me your number. I put it on this form that I have to complete for your corrections counselor, and then I get to go home."

Carter raised a defiant eyebrow and glared at the pudgy shit.

Undeterred, the guard sat back in his swivel chair. "You don't give me your number and my wife gets pissed. She gets pissed and I have to explain to her that some cocky punk kept me waiting. Then she'll get more pissed and yell that our tax dollars are what keep losers like you in three meals a day and coveralls." He sat forward. "So, last time. Number."

Carter glanced nonchalantly at the guard's fist gripping the baton attached to his belt and exhaled a long, bored breath. Any other day, he'd be ready for the douche to take a shot; he'd take the beating with a smile plastered on his face. But today, he wasn't in the mood.

"081056," Carter answered coolly, unable to resist a small wink.

With a fierce scowl, the guard scribbled the number on the form, then wheeled his seat over to give the form to a young blonde admin assistant. The fat fuck was too lazy to get up and walk the six steps.

Carter waited while Blondie typed in the number that had been his adopted name for the past nineteen months. He knew what charges would appear on the monitor: car boosting, handling a dangerous weapon, drug possession, drunk and disorderly conduct to name just a few. Contrary to popular belief, he wasn't proud of the list of crimes and misdemeanors, which could fill up two full screens. Nevertheless, it did give him a sense of self, which was something he'd been searching for aimlessly most of his twenty-seven years. He was still searching for it and, until he found that something the list was all he had.

Whatever.

He rubbed a palm across his buzz cut. He was sick of thinking about it.

The sound of paper ripping from an ancient printer had him back on point.

"Well, Mr. Carter." The guard sighed. "It appears your stay with us stretches for another seventeen long months. Being caught with coke will do that."

"It wasn't mine," Carter uttered flatly.

The guard gave him an insincere look of pity before grinning. "Damn shame."

Carter didn't respond, knowing that his parole application was mere weeks away, and snatched the form with a quick hand.

Flanked by another stern-looking guard, Carter strode past the desk and down a long, narrow corridor toward a white door, which he opened with a loud slap of his palm. The room was claustrophobic and sterile, and reeked of confessions. Despite the many hours he'd spent in the godforsaken place, it still made his pulse quicken and his palms sweat.

With a straight back and stiff shoulders, he walked toward the cheap wooden table where a large ape of a man smiled as Carter approached.

"Wes," Jack Parker, his corrections counselor, greeted him. "It's good to see you. Please take a seat."

Carter pushed his hands into the pockets of his coveralls and dropped ungracefully into the chair. Jack was the only person who used his first name. Everyone else called him Carter. Jack had been insistent about it, explaining that it was a way the two of them could build a trusting relationship.

Carter had explained that was a crock of shit.

"Got a smoke?" Carter glanced dismissively at the guard standing at the door at the other end of the room.

"Sure." Jack tossed a pack of Camels and a book of matches onto the table.

Carter's long, pale fingers grappled with the wrapper. It'd been two days since his last cigarette. He was desperate. Two broken matches and a string of curses later, he finally inhaled the thick, lush smoke. He closed his eyes, held his breath, and, for a split second, all was right with the world.

"Better?" Jack asked with a shrewd smile.

Blowing the smoke across the table, Carter nodded.

Carter was impressed when Jack resisted the urge to wave the smoke away. They both knew doing so would only encourage Carter to do it more; he gripped on to any sign of weakness or irritation with the tenacity of a terrier.

It was a defense mechanism, apparently.

They'd discussed it in one of their first sessions. The mechanism was so well executed that Carter came across as strong, dominating, and, the majority of staff and inmates at Arthur Kill would agree, intimidating as hell.

Jack pulled a seven-inch-thick file from his briefcase and opened it, flicking through the numerous reports, court statements, and testimonials that, over the years, described Carter as being a "menace to society," a "strong-willed character," and an "intelligent individual who lacks the self-confidence to assert and channel it correctly."

Again, whatever.

Carter was tired of hearing how much potential he had. Yeah, he was intelligent, and fiercely loyal to the people he cared about, but for as long as he could remember, he just couldn't seem to find a path that fit. All his life he'd been drifting, never welcome or comfortable in a place for long, dealing with his fucked-up family and friends who couldn't stay away from fucking drama for more than five minutes.

At least in lockup, shit was simple. Real-life problems were like urban myths told by those who visited from time to time. Not that Carter had many regular visitors.

Jack turned to the final page of the file and wrote the date at the top of the blank piece of paper, then pressed the record button on the small digital voice recorder sitting between them.

“Session sixty-four, Wesley Carter, inmate number 081056,” Jack began in a monotone. “How are you today?”

“Peachy keen,” Carter replied, stubbing out his cigarette while lighting another.

“Good.” Jack wrote a small note on the paper in front of him. “So, I attended a meeting yesterday regarding your enrollment in a couple of classes here at the facility.” Carter rolled his eyes. Jack ignored it. “I know you have strong views on the subject, but it’s important that you do things to challenge yourself while you’re in here.”

Carter dropped his head back and frowned at the ceiling. Challenge? The whole place was a damned challenge. It was a challenge to get through each day without blowing his freakin’ gasket at some of the dumb fucks in the place.

“There are a few options,” Jack continued. “English literature, philosophy, sociology. I explained to Mr. Ward and the education specialists that although you’d had problems with your previous tutors, you’ve changed from the seventeen-year-old high school dropout you used to be. Right?”

Carter cast him a skeptical glance.

Jack placed the tips of his fingers under his chin. “What would you like to study?”

“I don’t care.” Carter shrugged. “I just wish they’d leave me the fuck alone.”

“It’s all part of the conditions for the chance of early parole. You need to show progression in your rehabilitation. And if taking a couple of classes while you’re here does that, then you have to play the game.”

Carter knew that, and it infuriated him. Since the age of fifteen, he’d been passed from one lawyer, parole officer, and counselor to the next, with no thought about how or if he would ever do something more meaningful with his life. Though what meaningful meant, Carter had no fucking idea.

Nevertheless, after nineteen months at Kill, he was starting to think spending the rest of his days locked up wasn’t the attractive prospect he’d initially perceived it to be.

As a wayward, arrogant, angry teenager, he’d enjoyed having a revered reputation. Now the excitement and thrill had waned. Court, detention centers, and prison were old news, and he was getting bored with the law institution as a whole. If he didn’t change his shit, he’d be on the wrong side of thirty wondering what the fuck happened to his life.

Jack cleared his throat. “Have you had any visitors recently?”

“Paul came last week. Max is coming Monday.”

“Wes.” Jack sighed, pulling off his glasses. “You need to be careful. Max—he’s not good for you.”

Incensed, Carter slammed his palm on the table. “You think you have the right to say shit like that?”

Carter knew that Jack considered Max O’Hare a disease, infecting everyone around him with his drug issues, long criminal history, and his ability to land his friends in deep shit—Carter’s being in Kill a case in point. But Carter had owed Max big-time. Being in prison was simply squaring a debt, and he’d do it again in a heartbeat.

“No,” Jack soothed. “That’s not what I think at all—”

“Well, good,” Carter interrupted. “Because you have no idea what Max has been through, what he’s still going through. None.” He took a long pull on his smoke, staring at Jack over the burning embers.

“I know he’s your best friend,” Jack said after a moment of tense silence.

“Yeah,” Carter agreed with a sharp nod. “He is.”

And from what he’d heard from the guys who’d visited, Max needed him now more than ever.

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Even when Kat Lane was asleep, the world around her was shadowed and oppressive, riddling her dreams with fear. Her small hands gripped the sheets, twisting in desperation. Her closed eyes clenched and her jaw tightened while her head pressed into the pillows beneath it. Her spine was rigid and her feet moved in her sleep as she found herself running, panicked and terrified, down a shadowed alley.

A sob rose from her throat, trapped in a never-ending slide show of the night that had happened almost sixteen years before. “Please,” she whimpered into the darkness.

But no one would come to save her from the five faceless men who chased her. She shot up into a sitting position with a scream, sweating and breathless. Her eyes darted around her pitch-black room before, realizing where she was, she closed them and cupped her hands to her face. She exhaled through a rough throat and brushed the tears away, trying to calm herself with slow, deep breaths.

She’d woken this way every day for the past two weeks, and the grief that hit her every time she opened her eyes was all too familiar. She shook her head, exhausted.

Her doctor had told her not to stop taking her sleeping pills all at once, but to lower the dose gradually. Kat had dismissed her advice, determined to make it through one night without the aid of chemicals. It seemed her determination was wasted. She beat her fist on the mattress in frustration, then flicked on the bedside table lamp. But the light didn’t ease the fear and utter helplessness her nightmares brought her.

With a defeated sigh, she got up and went toward her bathroom, flinching at the bright lights. She glanced at her reflection in the mirror and frowned. Christ, she looked a lot older than twenty-four. Her face appeared

drawn, her green eyes dull and lifeless. She traced the dark shadows under them, then ran her hand through her hair. Instead of being its usual voluminous chestnut red, it hung lank and dry past her shoulders.

Her mother had told her that she'd lost weight, but Kat had dismissed her words. She always had to comment on something.

Kat was in no way skinny—having always been more curvaceous than skin and bone—but her size-ten jeans had become a little loose recently.

She opened the cabinet and pulled out a bottle of sleeping pills. She desperately wished for the night when she wouldn't have to rely on medicine to sleep. It wasn't like the pills helped all that much anyway; they simply numbed a pain that would never disappear. After taking two blue capsules, she padded back across the bare wood floor to bed.

Kat had realized a long time ago that there was no sleep deep enough to escape her nightmares. They were ingrained, part of who she was, and she'd never be rid of them. She knew no pill or therapy would ever erase the darkness and grief within her. Subsequently, she'd grown into a woman who was fiery and strong-minded. It was a safe way of keeping other people at arm's length, hiding her despair and fear behind a quick wit and sharp tongue.

She sank against her feather pillows. Would it ever get easier?

She didn't know. All she could focus on was the fact that sunrise would mean a new day, another day away from her past.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Lisa Hegland:

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Lacey Clements:

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Sandy Holiday:

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