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Angel of Death

Written by Ben Cheetham

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BEN
CHEETHAM
ANGEL
OF
DEATH



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Chapter One

Angel examined her face in the cracked mirror, combing her fingers through raven-black hair that framed intensely blue eyes and uncommonly pale cheeks. ‘You’re beautiful. You’re beautiful,’ she murmured, as though repetition would make the words true. But she wasn’t beautiful. Not any more. Her once crystal-clear eyes were yellowish and laced with spidery veins. Fine lines and dark shadows marred the surrounding skin. The cute dimples that used to appear when she smiled – not that she ever smiled these days – were gone. In their place were two sharply etched hollows, like knife cuts.

She ran her tongue over lips that appeared unusually full and sensual in her otherwise gaunt face. The best blowjob lips in the business, that’s what Deano called them. On the day they’d met he’d told her, ‘Those juicy babies are gonna be your ticket out of this life.’ She’d believed him at the time, just like she’d believed him later when he said he loved her. She didn’t believe him any more. She’d heard him say those words, or words like them, to too many other girls. She knew him now for what he was – pure poison. He’d given her nothing but had taken everything, and she’d let him. Wilfully, pathetically, she’d sold her last chance, her last grain of hope, for an earful

of his sweet bullshit and a veinful of smack. The knowledge made her burn with hatred.

Angel's fingers curled into a fist. She hit the mirror hard enough to send a jolt of pain rocketing up her wrist. When she drew her knuckles away from the glass, she left behind a bloody smear. She closed her eyes, letting the pain wash through her, using it to block out the hate like she had so many times before. But this time it wasn't enough. The hate kept on growing, expanding like waves from a limitless ocean. Violent visions flashed across the screen of her mind. Visions of herself lashing out at a faceless figure, punching, clawing and tearing. And as she did so, tears streamed from her eyes. Not tears of sorrow but tears of pleasure. It felt good, better than any sex she'd ever had. She began to rock back and forth. A low moan escaped her lips.

The daydream dissolved like a wisp of smoke as the bedsit's door creaked open. Eyelids snapping up, Angel jerked around to see Deano poking his head into the room. 'Grace, baby, it's—' he started to say.

'I asked you not to use that name,' Angel broke in sharply.

Deano dismissed her words with a crooked smile that showed a mouthful of stained and chipped teeth. The years hadn't been kind to him either. He was a big man, although not as big as he used to be. Slowly, the smack was wearing him away, eroding a few millimetres here, a centimetre there. He was still handsome in a rough sort of way, but his complexion was pimple-blotched and his hair was fast thinning. 'What does it matter? There's no one else around.'

'Please will you just call me Angel. Will you do that for me?'

'Alright, alright. Anything to stop your whining.' Deano

squinted through the dingy gloom of the room. ‘Look at the state of you. You’ve been crying again, haven’t you? What’s up? Actually, don’t bother telling me. Just sort your face out. It’s time to get back out there. Five minutes. I want you on the street in five minutes, or I’m really gonna give you something to cry about.’

Deano headed back outside, his footsteps thumping the bare floorboards as heavily as his fists would thump Angel if she didn’t get her arse and all the other parts of her body that helped pay the rent into gear. Four or five years ago he would have kissed her tears away and sweet-talked her into doing what he wanted. There was no need for any of that bullshit now. He had her exactly where he wanted her, and both of them knew it. It wasn’t just the smack. She knew plenty of other people she could score from. It was the things she’d told him. Thinking back on it, she wanted to slap herself for having opened up to him, for being so weak and stupid. But at the time she’d needed to talk, to confide in someone, otherwise she might have done something even more stupid. She hadn’t told him everything. There were things she couldn’t bear to think about, never mind talk about. But she’d told him enough.

After rinsing the blood off her knuckles at a sink in the corner, Angel put on lippy and mascara. She shrugged off her dressing-gown and slipped into a miniskirt, boob-tube and over-the-knee high-heeled boots. Picking up a can of pepper-spray and slinging a handbag over her shoulder, she hurried after Deano. As usual, he was lurking in the ginnel alongside a boarded-up terraced house a couple of streets away. A boy of maybe eighteen approached him at the same time as Angel, shoulders hunkered against the raw wind coming

off the River Tees. He handed Deano a couple of crumpled tenners, and Deano's hand emerged from the shadows holding a small foil wrap. The exchange happened fast, then the boy was hurrying away.

'Looking fuckable,' said Deano, approvingly surveying Angel's freshly applied slap before dropping his gaze to her outfit that left little to the imagination. Leaning forward with a sneering smile in his eyes, he added meaningfully, 'Angel.'

Hate surged up in Angel again. She had a sudden wild urge to empty the can of pepper-spray into Deano's eyes. Oh, how she would have loved to see the fucker scream and squirm. She saw herself doing it, then saw herself grinding a heel into his throat, crushing his windpipe. The far-off wail of a police siren brought her back to the moment with a slight start. 'Where do you want me?'

'Over by the bridge.' Deano scanned the street uneasily as he spoke, ear cocked towards the sound of the siren. The wailing faded away and his gaze returned to Angel. 'Do me proud, baby, and later we'll do a bit of you know what.' He rustled the foil wraps in his pocket. The sound, so repulsively yet irresistibly familiar to Angel, sent a shudder through her. It had only been a couple of hours since her last fix, but already the craving was growing. Her veins itched with it.

Angel tottered towards the Transporter Bridge, whose blue frame dominated the Middlesbrough skyline, straddling the Tees like a steel-limbed horse. She passed a scattering of other girls all dressed, like her, in high heels and revealing clothes. Most of their heavily made-up faces were familiar. Some of them smiled and nodded hello. She spotted a new girl scarcely old enough to be out of school, her eyes glazed with a tell-tale

sheen. The girl shifted nervously as Angel neared her. There was a bruise on her cheek, probably put there by one of the other girls protecting her patch. The girls looked out for each other, but that didn't stop fights from frequently breaking out over who worked the most lucrative spots. Angel gave her a smile, not of sympathy – her heart was too hardened by bitterness and anger for that – but of understanding. She knew what the girl was feeling. She'd been there herself not so many years ago. She didn't offer any words of reassurance. Some whores liked to take new girls under their wing, impart their wisdom. Not Angel. The idea repulsed her. Nothing this life had taught her was worth repeating.

A black BMW with tinted windows crawled along the kerb. One of the other girls lifted the hem of her skirt, exposing her bare crotch. But the car didn't stop. She shoved her middle finger up at it, mouthing, 'Fuck you.' The Beamer pulled over by Angel and the young girl. The driver-side window came down just enough for a massive hand adorned with chunky gold rings to beckon the girl. Flicking Angel a tense glance, the girl hurried to the passenger door and ducked into the car, which accelerated sharply away in the direction of the Transporter Bridge.

'Hope that little bitch isn't thick enough to let him take her over the river,' said the girl who'd been snubbed.

The other side of the Tees was a lonely mixture of heavy industrial land and the Seal Sands nature reserve. If you got into trouble, there was no one to hear you scream except the wildlife. Some girls came back robbed and raped. They were the lucky ones. In Angel's time, there had been two girls she knew of who never came back at all. Angel went there

occasionally, but only with her most trusted regulars who were willing to pay extra to indulge their vice in the safety of isolation. She stared after the fast-receding car, trying to make out the number plate. She caught the first three letters before the car turned from view. ‘B... A... D,’ she read aloud, a frown gathering on her brow.

‘Bad.’ The other girl shook her head. ‘That can’t be good.’

Another kerb-crawler pulled into view. The girl yanked her skirt up again. This time the car stopped. Angel continued to her patch – a corner between two warehouses a couple of hundred metres from the river. She sparked up and took a drag, watching the bridge’s gondola ferrying cars towards the north bank. She couldn’t be certain, but she thought she glimpsed the Beamer amongst them. A car pulled into the kerb. She flicked away her cig and ducked down to greet her first punter of the night.

The next hour went by in its usual way – a couple of blow-jobs, a handjob, straight sex that was over in less than two minutes. Even as Angel serviced her punters, her eyes kept shifting towards the bridge, watching for the Beamer or the girl. But there was no sign of them. Minute by minute, her uneasiness grew. She kept thinking of the number plate, and the more she thought of it, the more the letters seemed like some sort of omen. She returned along the street. ‘Has she been back?’ she asked the skirt-lifting girl, who shook her head in reply. ‘What do you reckon we should do?’

‘Sod all. What else can we do?’

Angel briefly considered going to Deano, but she knew what his response would be. *What the fuck do I care?* Her heart heavy with foreboding, she headed back to her corner. Her

mind flashed back to when she'd first worked the streets. The things that had happened to her. So many bad, ugly, twisted things she'd lost count. Sometimes she wondered how she was still alive, or even if she deserved to be.

A familiar car was waiting for Angel: a red Volvo estate. Its middle-aged driver had the unmistakable look of a family man – balding and grey, a little overweight, glasses, shirt and tie. His name was Kevin – or at least that's what he said it was – and he was one of Angel's regulars, an easy customer who liked a bit of domination, but nothing too kinky. As soon as she saw him, she knew what she had to do. 'Hi there, lover. What's it to be tonight?'

'The usual.'

Angel ducked into the passenger seat. 'You're not in a rush, are you?'

'Why do you ask?'

'Fancy taking a trip to the other side of the river? I'm in the mood for a drive.'

Kevin glanced uncertainly at the bridge. 'It's already late. The wife will start to wonder where I am.'

Angel's long red fingernails crawled up Kevin's thigh. 'I'll make it worth your while,' she purred. 'No extra charge.'

Still Kevin hesitated. Angel grabbed his crotch and gave it a hard squeeze. 'OK,' he groaned, his face wrinkling into a pleurably pained grimace. She let go and, shifting the car into gear, he accelerated towards the bridge. He paid the toll and drove onto the gondola.

'Come on, get a fucking move on,' muttered Angel, twisting to look at the bridge operator.

'You alright, Angel?' asked Kevin. 'You seem a bit tense, like.'

Angel forced a smile of pouting promise. ‘I’m fine, lover. I’m always fine, you know that.’

The thick steel cables that the gondola was suspended from vibrated as well-greased wheels cranked into motion nearly fifty metres overhead. As the gondola advanced across the broad, dark waters towards the north bank, Angel got out of the car and leaned against the railings, staring at the vast sprawl of petro-chemical refineries. Flames spouted from their chimneys, illuminating colossal tangles of steel pipes. The thought came to her, *What the hell are you doing? What’s this girl to you?* The answer was obvious – *Nothing*. And yet she had to do something. She didn’t understand why, but she felt it in her heart. Maybe it was because something about the girl had reminded her of herself. Or maybe that wasn’t it at all. Maybe it had more to do with the anger that was simmering inside her, ready to go off like a grenade at the slightest provocation.

There was a dull, heavy thunk as the gondola connected with the north bank. Angel returned to the car. ‘Where are we going?’ asked Kevin, accelerating away from the bridge.

‘Head towards Seaton. I’ll tell you when to stop.’

As they drove, Angel scanned the roadside. ‘Slow down,’ she said, whenever they came to a layby or anywhere else a car might pull over.

‘Are you looking for someone?’

Angel didn’t reply to Kevin’s question. They were nearing the muddy tidal estuary of Seal Sands – pretty much the final place the Beamer could have pulled over before hitting the coastal town of Seaton Carew. They passed a small car park on their left. No Beamer. To their right a narrow lane angled

away from the main road. It led, Angel knew, to a car park popular with bird- and seal watchers during the day, and lovers, doggers and stoned kids during the night. She gestured towards the lane, and Kevin turned onto it, his tongue running excitedly over his lips. He expelled a huff of breath upon reaching the car park. ‘Bloody hell, someone’s already using it.’

The Beamer was parked at the edge of the estuary. Its tinted rear windscreen gleamed in the Volvo’s headlights. ‘BAD,’ Kevin said, reading its number plate. ‘What kind of dickhead has a reg like that?’

‘Stop the car,’ said Angel.

Kevin shoved the gearstick into reverse. ‘We can use the other car park.’

‘I said stop!’

Kevin took his foot off the accelerator, but kept the engine running. ‘What’s going on, Angel?’ A little quiver in his voice suggested it had dawned on him that maybe he’d stumbled into something he wanted no part of.

‘Wait here.’

‘Listen, I don’t want to get into some kind of trouble.’

Angel’s nostrils flared. It was on her tongue to snap back, *Don’t be such a pussy!* But she resisted, reflecting that she should know better than to expect anything more from Kevin – or for that matter, any man. ‘Nothing’s going on, baby,’ she reassured him. ‘I know the owner of that car. I’m just going to say hi, that’s all.’

Looking unconvinced, Kevin cut the engine. ‘OK. Make it quick, though.’

Nothing much scared Angel, but her heart began to pound as she approached the Beamer. Her highly developed whore’s

instinct for sniffing out danger screamed that something dodgy was going on. It was impossible to tell if there was anyone in the car, but a faint light seeped from the edges of the doors. She raised one hand to knock on the driver-side window. Her other slipped into her handbag and curled around the pepper-spray. Before she could knock, the window came down a few centimetres. A puff of sickly sweet ganja smoke wafted out as a deep voice barked, ‘Fuck off.’

Stooping, Angel found herself looking into a pair of eyes glassy with dope and hard with threat. ‘I’m looking for a girl you picked up—’

A mouthful of gold teeth flashed from the Beamer’s interior as its driver broke in. ‘I said fuck off, bitch.’

As the window slid back up, Angel caught a glimpse of two parallel scratches still glistening with blood on the man’s cheek. Her already pounding heart surged at the sight. She took several hesitant steps away from the car. The scratches didn’t necessarily mean her instincts were right. She’d been with plenty of men who got turned on by being hit during sex. Men like Kevin who desired to be dominated and humiliated. The Beamer’s driver wasn’t one of those men. It was plain from his voice and eyes that he was the type who liked to dish it out rather than take it. Angel had been with plenty of that kind too. She still had the scars – both visible and invisible – to remind her.

Angel came to a stop as a savage burst of anger burnt away her fear. She felt suddenly as if her head was on fire. Her barely concealed breasts rose and fell as she sucked the night into her lungs. This fucker, this bad boy, thought that because the girl was a nobody, a nothing, he could do what he wanted

and there'd be no consequences. Well he was wrong. There would be consequences, painful consequences.

She scanned the ground and stooped to snatch up a chunk of concrete. Without pausing, she ran at the car and hurled the chunk at its driver-side window. The glass shattered with a loud pop. The driver reeled sideways, one hand flung up to protect his face, the other groping at something on the passenger seat. He let out a shrill yell as Angel emptied the can of pepper-spray into his eyes. She yanked open the door and dragged him out of his seat, her wiry muscles straining against his bulk. She saw what he'd been reaching for – there was a handgun on the passenger seat. Ducking into the car to grab it, she found the girl stretched out unconscious on the back seat, her skirt half torn away, blood crusting her inner thighs, her face a battered mask. She didn't appear to be breathing.

Her eyes a crucible of rage, Angel twisted towards the man writhing in agony at her feet. He blindly tried to defend himself as once, twice, three times she stamped her long, sharp heel into his face, ripping deep gouges. 'You fuck!' she shouted, spittle flying from her mouth. 'You sick fuck!'

She would have continued to stamp and stamp until the man's face was as unrecognisable as the girl's, if Kevin hadn't come sprinting over, crying out, 'Stop! For Christ's sake, stop!'

Angel jerked her eyes up to Kevin's, and he lurched to a halt as if he'd come up against a wall of flames. He spread his hands, palms out. 'Please, Angel. You'll kill him.'

'And why shouldn't I?' she snarled. 'The bastard deserves it.'

'Why? What's he done?'

'He's killed her, that's what.'

His face as pale as the moon, Kevin asked, 'Killed who?'

‘The girl.’ Angel gestured at the car. ‘She’s in there.’

Kevin edged around Angel. He reached for the back door handle, but hesitated. He pulled his sleeve down over his hand, then opened the door. ‘Oh Jesus,’ he gasped on seeing the girl. He felt for a pulse in her neck. His eyes widened. ‘She’s alive!’

‘Are you sure?’

‘Her pulse is weak, but it’s definitely there.’ Kevin pulled out his mobile phone.

‘What are you doing?’

‘What do you think I’m doing? I’m phoning for an ambulance.’

Angel snatched the phone away. ‘No you’re not.’

Kevin looked at her in stunned silence for a second. ‘But she’ll die if I don’t.’

‘No she won’t, because you’re going to take her to hospital.’

Kevin’s forehead contracted. ‘I can’t do that, Angel. If I’m seen with this girl, it... well, it would—’ His voice snagged in his throat at the thought of what it would do to him if word of this got back to his wife.

‘I don’t give a shit what it’d do to you. You’re taking her.’

‘No I’m not.’

Kevin recoiled back against the car, his chest heaving as Angel aimed the gun at him. Her voice as hard as the steel the nearby factories produced, she said, ‘Yes you are.’

‘OK, OK, I’ll do it. Just stop pointing that thing at me.’

Angel lowered the gun. A groan from the prostrate man drew her attention. He was struggling to sit up, his muscular, tattooed arms trembling from the effort. She drove her heel into his face again, sending him crashing onto his back. ‘Bitch,’ he choked out, blood dribbling between his lips.

‘Keep your fucking mouth shut unless you want more of the same,’ snapped Angel. She looked at Kevin. ‘Get her into your car.’

As Kevin hooked his hands under the girl’s armpits and pulled her from the car, she exhaled a whisper of a moan. Her eyelids fluttered and cracked open a fraction. Angel leaned over her like a mother over a child. ‘That’s it, come on, open your eyes.’

The slitted eyes closed again.

‘Hold on, baby girl, we’re going to get you to hospital.’

The girl’s limbs dangled like broken twigs as Kevin carried her to his car and laid her on its back seat. Breathing heavily, he turned to Angel. ‘You coming?’

‘No.’

The creases on Kevin’s forehead deepened. His eyes flicked between Angel and the man at her feet. ‘What are you going to do?’

‘You don’t need to worry about that, all you need to worry about is getting her to hospital. Oh, and if I find out you’ve dumped her somewhere and rung for an ambulance, I’m not going to be best pleased.’ Angel patted the gun. ‘You get me?’

Kevin nodded, his tongue darting dryly across his lips. ‘You’re not going to do anything crazy—’

‘Get the fuck out of here,’ cut in Angel, her eyes flashing.

Flinching from her fury, Kevin ducked into his car. He accelerated away, wheels spitting gravel. Angel waited until he hit the main road before returning her attention to the Beamer’s driver. His eyes glared at her from between swollen pouches of flesh, glistening with hate but also fear. It sent a thrill through Angel almost as heady as a hit of junk to see

his fear, to know that, for once in her life, she was the one with the power. ‘On your belly.’ Her voice was calmer. The anger was still there, but she was controlling it now, not it her.

Groaning, the man slowly rolled onto his belly.

‘Now crawl to the river. Crawl like the worm you are.’

The man dug his fingers into the cracked concrete and dragged himself forward. The light from the Beamer’s interior only stretched a few metres. At the edge of its reach, estuary mud glistened palely in the moonlight. When her heels sank into the mud, Angel said, ‘Stop.’

The man lay panting, agonised tremors vibrating through his body.

‘Roll over,’ said Angel. ‘I want to see your face.’

The man heaved himself onto his back again. He stared up at Angel, his mud-smearred face invisible except for the red-laced whites of his eyes and the gleam of his gold teeth. ‘You don’t know who the fuck I am,’ he gasped, his voice cramped with pain.

‘Yeah I do. I’ve known you all my life.’

Angel took aim. The man flung up a hand as if he might ward off a bullet with it. ‘Wait! Fucking wait! I’ve got money.’ He fumbled out his wallet and tossed it to Angel. ‘There’s more than a thousand quid in there. It’s yours.’

Angel took out the money and shoved it into her handbag. She didn’t look to see if there was any identification – she already knew all she needed to know about the man – she just threw the wallet into the estuary. Again, she took aim. Again, the man raised a hand. ‘Why are you doing this?’ he asked, panic sucking at his voice.

Angel studied the man with a cold fire behind her eyes, greedily drinking in his fear, savouring its bittersweet taste. ‘The same reason you did what you did. Because I can.’

The fear in the man’s eyes was joined by a hopeless rage. He spat a glob of phlegm at Angel, which left a bloody snail-trail down her thigh. ‘Fuck you, bitch! Fuck all you slags. I’d kill the lot of you if I got the chance.’

‘Well you’re not going to get the chance.’

Angel pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. She pulled it again. Still nothing. ‘Shit.’ The word whistled through her teeth as she thought, *The fucking thing’s broken*. Another thought came to her. *The safety must be on*. A quick examination of the gun revealed a catch marked ‘Safety’ above the trigger. She flicked it.

‘Please, I don’t want to die!’ pleaded the man as Angel took aim again. An ear-splitting shot rang out. The gun’s recoil jerked her hand upward. The muzzle flash set pinpoints of light dancing in front of her eyes. The man screamed and flailed in the estuary slime, clutching his right shoulder. As her vision cleared, Angel took careful aim at his chest. The man just had time to cry out some incomprehensible final words before a second bullet punched the breath from his lungs. He lay gurgling like the estuary for a moment, then fell silent.

Angel closed her eyes and drew in a slow, deep breath. The night tasted good. It felt good against her skin. She felt good. Strong and alive! Every sensation in her body seemed to be heightened almost to the point of ecstasy. She hugged herself, moaning, swaying. She wasn’t sure how long she stood there immersed in the throbbing whirlpool of her mind, but when she opened her eyes the tide was lapping at the man. Soon it

would cover him, and as it receded it would draw him out to sea, hopefully never to be seen again.

Slipping the gun into her handbag, Angel approached the BMW. She considered burning it out, but dismissed the idea, realising she almost certainly wouldn't have time to get back to town before a passer-by alerted the police. With her jacket sleeve, she rubbed the door handle she'd touched. She didn't know whether doing so would erase her fingerprints, but she figured it was worth a try. Keeping her hand covered, she reached into the car and switched off the interior light. Then she started walking.

It was at least six miles back to town. Angel hadn't gone far before her ankles started to throb. She took off her boots and continued barefoot, keeping her eyes and ears peeled for vehicles. A fragmentary hedgerow ran alongside the road. Whenever she saw approaching headlights or heard the rumble of an engine, she ducked out of sight until the vehicle had passed. Her mobile phone rang. She flipped it open and 'Deano' flashed up on its screen. She wasn't surprised. He rang several times a night. He said he did it because he cared about her, which of course was bullshit. The only thing he gave a toss about was making sure his property was in working order. The temptation not to answer was strong, but the consequences wouldn't be worth it. She put the phone to her ear and said in a hushed tone, 'I can't talk right now, Deano. I'm with a punter.'

'Where?'

'The Thistle Hotel. He's a businessman. I reckon I'm onto a good little earner. I'll call you as soon as I'm done.'

'Make sure you work him for all he's got.'

'I always do, baby.'

Angel hung up, reflecting that it was a lucky thing for her the dead man had attempted to buy his way out of trouble. Three or four hundred quid of the thousand would be enough to keep Deano sweet. As for the rest, she would find some way of getting it to the girl, assuming she survived her injuries.

Dawn was beginning to crack by the time Angel reached the Transporter Bridge. She paid the toll and leaned wearily against the gondola's railings. She could feel the beginnings of withdrawal symptoms setting in – her teeth chattered as if she had a fever, and bitter mucus ran down the back of her throat. It wasn't just withdrawal, though. For hours she'd been on a high unlike any she'd ever known, but now she was coming down, and she was coming down hard. She scratched the track marks on her arms, itching for the oblivion of heroin. Glancing around furtively, she slipped a hand into her handbag and touched the gun. The feel of the plastic grip sent a little shuddering thrill through her. Wrinkles of indecision spread over her face. She'd intended to toss the gun into the Tees, but now that it came to it she was reluctant to do so. She closed her handbag. She knew it was crazy to keep the gun, but she couldn't bring herself to get rid of it. Not with the memory of the feeling that had coursed through her body as she pulled the trigger so fresh in her mind.

An orange glow crept across the water, followed by the emerging sun. Angel blinked, tears rising in her eyes. She'd seen the sunrise hundreds of times before during her nocturnal existence. But she'd never seen it like this, so brilliant and blazing. Her trembling subsided as its faint, cleansing warmth washed over her. Then the gondola passed into the shadows of the industrial units on the south bank, and the moment

was gone. Not that it had really been anything other than a fleeting illusion. The sun was for other people, not her. She'd learnt, or rather been taught, that hard lesson a long time ago.

Angel felt as though she was wading through deep water, but even so she walked fast, dragged along by the heroin itch. She found Deano crashed out on the bed, his tracksuit bottoms around his ankles, a fresh track mark where he'd injected the big artery in his groin. The veins in his arms had collapsed years ago. Angel had bad veins too. Recently there had been times when she'd missed by so much that blood had streamed down her wrists. So she too had taken to injecting her groin, or as Deano called it, 'opening the window'.

Deano's eyelids fluttered but didn't open as Angel slipped a hand into his pocket and pulled out a small lump of black tar heroin wrapped in cellophane. She took a shoebox full of drug-taking paraphernalia from under the bed, tore open an alcohol swab and cleaned her hands and a bent spoon. She dissolved the lump on the spoon over a lighter, then placed a little ball of cotton-wool in the solution. When the ball had puffed up, she inserted a syringe into it and drew up all the dirty-brown liquid. Spreading her legs as if for a punter, she felt for the pulsing femoral artery. She slid the needle in and pulled the plunger a millimetre. Blood swirled into the syringe barrel. Slowly, she depressed the plunger. The rush was instant, enveloping her like a lover's soft, warm embrace, soothing away all the pain and memories. Eyeballs rolling, she lay back next to Deano. As sweet oblivion stole over her, she replayed in her mind the moment the man had died. That was one memory she wanted to hold on to. Always.