

Blind Fury  
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# Prologue

Eva walked between the few parked cars at the London

Gateway service station off the M1 motorway. Although the car park was not badly lit she was nervous in such an alien, silent place. In total contrast were the blazing lights from all the various cafés, paper shops and games machines. Yet at this hour of the night everywhere was empty, and no matter how well lit it was, she felt uneasy being alone as she passed through.

The ladies' toilets were white, vast and cold, and the strip-lighting gave the empty cubicles sinister shadows. There was an orange cone with a sign warning customers of the wet floors, but she didn't see anyone cleaning.

Eva waited patiently for the solitary man serving at the coffee bar to acknowledge her. When he eventually glanced towards her, she asked for a hot chocolate. He stared at her as he used the hot milk machine and the only words he spoke were to enquire whether or not she wanted chocolate sprinkled on top of the froth.

Eva carried her drink to a table close to a window overlooking the car park. She was the only customer. Her boyfriend Marcus had instructed her to wait for him there, saying he would join her as soon as the AA came and the car was fixed.

Eva and Marcus were on their way to Manchester to meet his parents after announcing their engagement. He had borrowed a friend's car to use for the journey. It had started to backfire as soon as they drove onto the M1, and by the time they turned into the service station it was obvious that something was very wrong. It was one o'clock in the morning and freezing cold, so Marcus had insisted that Eva go inside and keep warm. The only reason the couple were travelling so late was that they both worked in a restaurant and had to wait until it closed for the night before they could start off.

Taking out her mobile phone, Eva placed it on the Formica-topped table by her hot chocolate. From the window she watched a car draw up with a family inside – a couple with two small children, one crying and one asleep. She saw the woman carry the sleeping child towards the ladies' toilets as the man carried the by now screaming child into the café. He ordered from the same truculent attendant. Eva watched him put the child down as he selected cakes and drinks, packets of crisps and Coca Cola. The family sat at a table at the far side of the café away from the window.

Eva sipped her hot chocolate, taking another look at her watch. She fingered her mobile, wondering if she should call Marcus to see if the AA had turned up yet, but then decided against it.

Staring from the window, she noticed a woman walking across the car park smoking a cigarette; as she came closer she tossed the butt aside. Eva did not see if she had come from a car, but watched her enter the station and head towards the toilets. It was quite a while before the same woman walked out. She had done something to her hair and even though it was very cold outside she carried her coat. She was wearing a tight-fitting T-shirt, a mini-skirt and high-heeled shoes. Eva watched her zig-zag across the car park, then stop and light another cigarette before disappearing towards the petrol station.

She must be freezing, the girl thought.

Now, looking over at the family, she watched as they opened up the crisps and whispered to each other as one child still remained sleeping, cradled in the woman's arms. It was almost one-fifteen and there was still no sign of Marcus. Opening her bag, Eva began checking through the pockets for something to do. She took out a glossy lipliner and traced her lips. She checked receipts and the contents of her purse, and then glanced down at the small overnight bag she'd placed beside her.

Just then, Eva's attention was caught by a man entering the café. She turned immediately, hoping it would be Marcus, but it wasn't. She heard him order a sandwich and a cup of tea. Tall and well-built, he was wearing some kind of donkey jacket and dark trousers. She quickly looked away as he surveyed the café dining area, and was still gazing out of the window when she heard the chair scrape at the table directly beside hers.

She could hear him unwrapping the cellophane from his sandwiches and then she jumped as he said, 'Cold, isn't it?'

She half-turned towards him and gave a small nod.

'You driving?' he asked.

She didn't want to be drawn into conversation and just nodded her head again.

'Where you going to?'

She kept her eyes on her empty hot-chocolate beaker. 'Manchester,' she said quietly.

'Manchester,' he repeated.

Eva picked up her phone and turned completely away from him, hoping he would leave her alone.

'You from there?'

'No.'

'I'm sorry, I don't mean to intrude – was just wondering what a pretty girl like you is doing here all on her own at this time of night.'

She made no reply, thinking that if she did it would simply draw him into making more conversation, but her lack of response didn't stop him.

'If you need a lift, I'm going to Manchester. I drove down to London this morning.'

Still she made no reply. Then she heard the scrape of his chair again and hoped he was leaving. She physically jumped when he leaned on her table.

'I'm going to have another cup of tea,' he said. 'Can I get you something? What were you drinking – coffee?'

'No, thank you.'

She didn't turn to watch him head back to the counter, but continued to stare out of the window, willing Marcus to appear. She heard the stranger laughing and asking how long the muffins had been on display. She didn't, however, hear him heading back to the table and was startled when he placed down a hot chocolate beside her.

'He said this is what you ordered. I've got sugar if you need it.'

'No, thank you, I don't want—'

Before she could finish he drew out a chair to sit opposite her, putting down a tray containing two muffins and his tea.

'Have one of these. He said they were fresh – I doubt it though. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if they were the same muffins I saw laid out when I was last here,' he chortled.

'I don't want another hot chocolate or a muffin, thank you.'

She bent down as if to pick up her overnight bag and could see his thick, rubber-soled shoes, the reason she hadn't heard him approach the table.

'Don't make me eat both of them – go on.'

'No, thank you.'

She felt uneasy, but he was completely relaxed, taking a large bite of his muffin and wiping the corners of his mouth with his forefinger.

'Where are you from? I detected a bit of an accent.'

'I'm from the Ukraine.'

'Really? I've never been there. What work do you do?'

'I work in a restaurant, but I am studying English.'

'Good for you. Must be hard coming to a different country and finding a job when there's not a lot of work around. Mind you, you're a very pretty girl so I doubt if you'd have any trouble.'

She looked away from him as he continued eating his muffin and picked up her mobile.

'Excuse me, I have to call my boyfriend.'

Eva scrolled through to Marcus's mobile number, but the screen registered no signal.

'Not getting through?'

'No.'

'What make of phone is that?'

'Nokia.'

'Is your battery fully charged?'

'I'm not sure.'

He sipped his tea as she tried again to contact Marcus. She could feel the man watching her.

'I've got a Nokia,' he said. 'If you like, you can recharge it from my van.'

She looked at him and shook her head. Again she made as if to pick up her overnight bag.

'You see that woman coming across the car park?'

Eva turned to see the same woman she had noticed earlier smoking another cigarette and tossing it aside as she headed once more for the ladies' cloakroom.

'Hard to believe, isn't it, but she's a tart. Works the trucker stop, goes into the ladies' to wash up, then she's back out again chatting up the drivers. It's disgusting. The security around here is pitiful. I know the police move them on, but they're like homing pigeons and I've seen her around here for years.'

Eva picked up her overnight bag and rested it on her knees.

'I look out for young girls like you. Gimme your phone and let me make sure I've got the right extension to recharge it for you.'

'No, really.' She half-rose from her chair.

'What's the matter with you? I'm only being helpful and my van is just across the car park.'

He leaned towards her and she smelled his smoky breath. 'You're not scared of me, are you? Listen, love, on a night like this, freezing cold out there, I'm only trying to be helpful.'

'My boyfriend is coming any minute.'

The man rocked back in his chair, shaking his head.

'What kind of boyfriend is it that leaves such a lovely-looking girl all on her own at this time of night? Come on, I'm just being friendly.'

'No. You have been very kind and I appreciate it.'

Eva stood up, incredibly relieved as she saw Marcus pulling up directly outside in the car park. For the first time she smiled, picking up her mobile and slipping it into her handbag. She left the hot chocolate and the muffin untouched as she hurried out of the café.

The man watched her as she ran over to the beat-up Ford Escort, the young handsome boyfriend climbing out and opening the passenger door for her to get inside. He saw her reach up to kiss him and then she turned to give a small wave towards him as Marcus got in beside her. Their headlights caught the man staring towards them, but the car had driven off before either could see the look of blind fury pass over his face. He clenched his fists.

It was a while before he had finished eating the second muffin, but he didn't touch the hot chocolate. Instead he placed it onto the tray with his empty tea beaker and tipped the waste into the bin provided. He then stashed the tray and walked out, turning up the collar of his black donkey jacket, almost hiding his face that still had such anger etched across it.

He had been certain about the girl. Seeing her lit up in the service station's café window she had excited him; she was enticing him – she was no better than the cheap whore washing herself in the ladies' toilet.

She would have been exactly what he was looking for.