

Read an extract:
Violent Shadows
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Dark angels

Some angels have black wings like crows. Raven. Jackdaw. Rook. Wings that rustle, like old newspapers chafing against each other, in a gust of wind, let into a long locked room. The sheen of black wings like old mourning clothes gone shiny with too much ironing. Black wings of mourning clothes emerging from mothballs once too often. Grief turned to rage, tears into a thirst for blood.

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Tara was caught in the thickening crowd, the dark smoky shades of winter clothes drawing feeble light from a steely, merciless sky. After the first explosion the noise around her broke down into individual sounds: bodies colliding, the rustle of clothing, a call, a cry, feet running, the tapping of heels. The crowd became so dense, Tara couldn't move. Brown, blue black, the darkness closed in like a clamour of rooks around a small, brightly coloured bird. Chapped, peaky faces drifted by, panic animating pinched blue lips and red rimmed eyes. In the surge forward, an old man was shoved to one side, a woman stumbled and scraped her thigh, a toddler began to cry. Tara clutched onto a small grey nylon holdall. Behind her buildings seemed to breathe, then tremble.

There was a pause. Then a thunderous, reverberating blast rolled towards her and threw her up in the air. The second explosion lodged itself inside her head, slammed her into a brick wall. Everything moved in slow motion; there was rubble everywhere, bricks flying. She fell, grazing her forehead on the kerb. Across the road she saw a man lying on his stomach. The sound of the blast was still echoing in her ears. The air was full of screaming, ambulance sirens, women crying. People were still running. There was blood leaking from a man's head. The red flashes from an ambulance hurt Tara's eyes.

When she managed to stand up, her legs crumpled beneath her. She tried again. Picking up the holdall she walked deliberately around the corner, like a drunk pretending to be sober. In a narrow backstreet, in the derelict industrial part of the city, she slumped down into the deep entrance steps of an empty building. She was a small woman, hardly more than a girl, slight, birdlike, angular, with wisps of cropped dark hair softening a pale, elfin face. Tucking her feet up so that she was completely invisible from the road she began to check the contents of the holdall.

Beneath a surface layer of clothes, the bag contained five Woolworths' clocks with clockwork insides, a list of suppliers of chemical ingredients, cellophane, ten pairs of white cotton gloves and three sizes of screwdriver. She hadn't lost anything, nothing was damaged. A girl with an English accent in an English city street, it was unlikely she'd be stopped. And if she was, she knew very little, God knows, the blast had just proved that. There was a drop-off address for the goods, then she had a separate meeting with Michael. Suddenly it seemed as if she were the only person taking risks. She didn't even know if Michael was his real name.