

Cage spinning, world a blur. Now you see it, now you don't. A lover's moon, a killer's sky. Clouds like frenzied daubs.

The cage lurched again.

She was shivering, raw, numbed by the driving rain. Could barely manoeuvre in the stricture of the cage. Had to climb up a couple of hoops, fingers and trainers slipping on the rain-slicked bars, before she could twist her body round and look down and see what she already feared she would see—

—Teague leering up at her with a rictus-like grin as he clawed up the side of the cage like some vile insect closing on its prey, mandibles glistening with moonlit drool, black leather coat snapping in the wind like the gluttonous twitch of laminated wings.

Only inches away.

She lashed out with her foot, succeeded only in barking her shin.

Teague laughed. He seemed to know no fear. Now he had both feet on the bottom rung, was hanging there. Swinging the cage.

“Thought you could get rid of me that easily?”

He crooked an elbow round one of the bars then reached inside. She tried to squirm out of his grasp but there was nowhere to go. She felt his fingers tighten about her neck, thumb and forefinger closing on her throat. Wasn't sure if the howling she could hear was the rush of blood in her ears or the rising wind, wasn't sure if the rolling thunder was the tumult of her heart or the swollen river below. She grabbed his wrist with both hands and tried to prise his elbow from the bar. But this was his steely grip on life, and she would need a blowtorch to cut it free. Meanwhile he was squeezing the life from her like toothpaste from a tube. She gave up on his arm, now clawed wildly at his face.

Then something sharp pierced her right hand and brought her instantly back from the brink. She saw his face clearly, the clenched teeth, jaw muscles jumping beneath rivulets of rain, hair whipping in the wind, his empty black eyes—

—saw the glint of metal sticking out of his breast pocket and made a grab for it, Teague's eyes widening as she snatched it free, his fingers now pincer-crushing her windpipe as though trying to rip it from her throat, her vision blurring, the pressure in her lungs unbearable, only seconds she knew before the lights began popping behind her eyes, seconds before it was all over, all in vain—