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opening extract from

Blade: Breaking Free

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Ever wondered where you go when you're dead? Then watch this space. Cos I've been there. And here's something to blitz your mind.

I'm still there.

And I might not be coming back.

It's out of my control now. I can't make anything happen in this place. It's just me and Death. And you don't mess with him. He's the gobbo in charge.

But what's it like? I'll tell you, Bigeyes.

First up, no lights or heavenly voices. None of that

stuff. What you get is memories. It's just like they say. They come flashing past. They're like pictures.

They're doing it now. Pictures of people, places, stuff you've done. Your life like a movie spinning through you. And that's where it hurts.

Cos I don't want to see mine.

Or most of it. Maybe bits. The times with Becky.

Now don't get confused, cos there's two Beckys, right? Sweet and sour. There's the one who died. That's sweet Becky. And there's the one who should have died. The sour one—the troll, the dreg.

The one who zipped me over and told me little Jaz was her daughter when she wasn't. I got lots of names for that troll. But we'll call her Bex, all right? So you don't get stumped in the head. Cos you get stumped easy, don't you, Bigeyes?

Becky and Bex, sweet and sour. Got it?

I've been seeing pictures of sweet Becky. Her beautiful face, those eyes. Her hair used to shine. Did I ever tell you that? And it had this kind of smell. Sort of fragrant.

Even the day she died she smelt like a flower. And looked like one.

I miss her, Bigeyes. She's the only picture I want to see in all these memories. But I got no choice about that. I got to deal with the rest of 'em too. And they're coming thick as rain. Death's one busy gobbo.

And here's something else.

They don't all make sense. It's weird, Bigeyes. All this stuff, all these pictures—they're kind of cloudy. I thought everything would be clear in Death's little snug.

But it's not clear at all. I'm seeing things I remember and yet I don't remember. Does that make sense? Like they're memories but they're not. Things I've done only I've forgotten.

Specially the early stuff.

That's the stuff that's really hard to see. I can see bits but lots of it's sort of shadowy, like it's almost a memory but not quite. Maybe that's a good thing. I've never liked remembering.

But at least it's not jumping about. It comes in the right order. Starts with Day One. And here's the first problem. Cos Day One's a shadow. Can't remember Day One, can't see it clear. But I can feel it. And that's the second problem.

Cos it was trouble. I'm telling you, it was trouble.

That's right, Bigeyes. The bad stuff started on Day One.

Don't ask me how I know.

And the pictures keep coming. Age one, age two, age three and on they go. I don't like to watch 'em but they keep coming. They just won't stop. He's one mean gobbo, this Death.

Age seven.

I'm standing on the pedestrian crossing, stopping all the traffic, swearing at the drivers. Only now, when I see it flashing in front of me, it's not like I remember it. What's different is me.

I'm different.

Cos I'm not just a seven-year-old kid in this picture. I'm a kid who's lived for seven years. And that's not the same thing at all. Not when I've just watched those seven years again and seen what's in 'em, and who's in 'em, and what happened.

And there's shadows in there too, stuff I can't see, stuff I've blocked out and don't want to remember. Or maybe it's stuff that's blocked me out. Don't know. Doesn't make much difference.

It's bad anyway.

I'm seeing that kid on the pedestrian crossing like I'm watching someone I never knew before. Only there's no time to think about it. Cos there's more pictures coming.

Age eight, and then the change, the big change. If it was bad before, it's worse now. New places, new faces, new dangers. Big new dangers. Only I'm getting dangerous too. You better believe it. I'm getting dangerous too.

And I'm starting to like it.

Age nine, age ten. It changes again. I meet Becky, sweet Becky. Good pictures at last, only more dangers too, more faces. I can see most of 'em now. Not many shadows here. It's the stuff before seven that's cloudy. This later stuff's easy to see.

And I don't like it.

I almost prefer the shadows. They're bad news but at least I can't see what they are. These other pictures—I can't miss 'em. Each one's like the knife Trixi's brother stung in my head.

And they're coming too fast. I want to tell Death to slow down, only I don't dare. Like I say, you don't mess with this gobbo.

Age ten. Yeah, I'm still seeing age ten. It's taking time to run through. That's cos so much happened in it. Too much. I'm starting to hurt, starting to want out. I'm starting to lose it. Only good thing is Becky.

Then I lose her too.

Age eleven. When it came to a head, when it all got too much. And then I'm gone.

Only I'm not. I've run away, left the old place far behind. I've moved to the city and I'm playing dead. I thought it was a good idea. But I should have known better. It was a dimpy idea. It worked for three years.

But they were always going to find me.

You can't play dead with these gobbos. The only dead for them is real dead. And you don't play it. Cos dead's not a game. Not with them.

The pictures keep coming. Lots of 'em now. Like the closer I get to when the knife plugged me, the better I see stuff. Maybe it's just cos it's more recent. Don't think so though. Death's not fussy how he gives you stuff. He just blams it in your face. And right now he's spinning more than I can keep up with.

There's the places in the city, places where I slapped it, living rough on the streets, before I found

my snugs. Duffs I hung around with in alleys, doorways, hovels, ruins, finding out where they went.

Then finding my own way.

The houses and flats and other places I snugged out in. I got pictures of all of 'em rushing through my head. And all the nebs I saw. The slugs I kept away from in the city, the gangs who caught up with me.

Like Trixi's lot.

And then Mary. Old white-haired Mary with her crazy dog. And here's another thing about Death, Bigeyes. He's not fair. You'd think now he's got me he'd tell me what happened in the bungalow that day.

Only no.

Like I say, he's one mean gobbo.

He shows me the house again, and the gobbos. I can see 'em forcing their way in. Paddy and his mate, and the fat man, the hairy grunt. I can see myself running away. I can hear the gunshots again.

Bang! Bang!

Two of 'em, loud in my brain. Only I still can't see what happened in the bungalow. Why won't Death show me that?

Cos he's too hot with buzzing the next picture at me. Trixi's body lying on the floor. Paddy leering in the doorway. Sour Bex smashing the window, and me and her running away.

And I still don't know what happened to Mary. Cos everything's moving again. It's me and Bex and now little Jaz. I don't know she's Trixi's daughter. Bex's told me the kid's her own. Only Bex was lying.

And the pictures keep coming. Bex disappears, Jaz disappears. I find 'em again, only I find the girl gang too. And Riff. And Dig, the big guy, Trixi's brother, the guy with the knife.

And the gobbos are still after me. Paddy's gone but there are still five left. And I'm wounded now. Dig's knife's ripped up my forehead and I'm blacking out. And here's where everything turns dark.

What do I remember at the end?

A knife moving, cool as a breeze. A hot pain singing in my head. The trolls in the girl gang screaming. Riff standing back, Dig grinning. The whole crowd bundling me onto the bank, leaving me by the river. The stumble to the warehouse, the gobbos closing in.

A thought fluttering in my head. I'm fourteen and I'm going to die.

Darkness. Then gunshots.

Bang! Bang!

Two of 'em. Like the time at the bungalow. And then the voice.

It speaks my name. The name sweet Becky gave me long ago. Only the person speaking doesn't know that name. I know that cos I recognize the voice. It's the last thing I remember before this. And I'm freaking out, Bigeyes.

Cos the voice is speaking again now. I can hear it right this moment. Speaking my name like it did before.

'Blade,' it says.

And I'm feeling this shiver.

Cos the person speaking my name is dead too.

'Blade,' says the voice.

It's Mary. Old white-haired Mary with the crazy dog. But Mary's dead.

'You're dead,' I murmur.