

## **Angels in the Mist**

By Ryan Southwick

### Synopsis

ANNE is a 36-year-old waitress and PTSD sufferer in contemporary San Francisco who longs for a normal life, and a normal relationship, but has resigned herself to having neither. Every aspect of her life is designed to minimize the effects of her chronic posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from a violent sexual assault when she was a teenager, though she still has severe flashbacks.

A close encounter with a potential suitor leaves Anne as lonely as she was before, but for the first time in years, she finds the strength to leave the safety of her apartment to try and find someone special. She meets WILLIAM at a bus stop and goes on a date, but she discovers that his kindness was a facade when he traps her in a furniture store and threatens to hurt her. Anne tears a disfiguring gash in his face during her struggle to escape but is ultimately trapped. The ordeal throws her into an immersive hallucinatory flashback of her teenage sexual assault where her brother stood by and simply watched. A mysterious HERO comes to her rescue. William slits her throat and runs. Her hero carries her all the way across the city to the hospital.

Weeks pass. While Anne is waiting for her mystery hero to reappear, a homeless and destitute William encounters a stranger who promises him power beyond his wildest dreams. The stranger forces William to drink his blood, then commands him to flee. William wakes several hours later without memory of what happened, but a foreign instinct compels him to kill a homeless man by drinking his blood.

Anne's hero, CHARLIE, surprises her at her work the next day, and they have dinner. Everything goes well until they return to her apartment and discover the corpse of a homeless man in her closet. Watching his handiwork from the shadows, William suffers an agonizing pain that transforms him into vampire. Afterward, he feels better than he ever has, except for the wound Anne had inflicted in the furniture store that refuses to heal.

While William is enjoying his newfound abilities, Charlie and Anne develop a phone relationship over the next several weeks that culminates into a sizzling date at the opera, but their intimacy is hampered by Anne's PTSD. Anne is surprised to learn that Charlie is the genius CEO of the most successful tech company in the world. One of William's vampires attacks on their walk back to the car, and Anne is shocked when Charlie defeats him with a show of superhuman strength. She is drawn into Charlie's bizarre world and discovers that he's a cyborg living in his factory with his partner, MARK, and two female androids, one of whom is ZIMA, a stoic blonde with a violent history. In a strange turn of events, Zima courts Anne alongside Charlie, leading Anne into two relationships that make her question her own sexuality.

William's vampires ambush Zima and critically damage her, throwing Anne into despair, and only after a dicey procedure is Zima brought back online. The ordeal not only brings Anne and Zima closer together, it also brings Anne and Charlie closer because of his role in saving Zima, and for a short time, apart from her PTSD interfering with her ability to be intimate with Charlie, Anne is happy living at the factory.

Until William kidnaps her and her best friend, DORIS. Zima kills an entire den of vampires in an impressive rescue attempt, but they don't find Anne until later and discover that she is turning into a vampire, which will put her under William's absolute mental control. In a desperate move, they infuse her with Mark's genetically altered blood and give her a replica of

Mark's computer implant, which gives him control over his own cellular functions.

Anne wakes after a harrowing transformation, hungry for blood, but with the help of her new friends is able to cope with her insatiable appetite. Anne discovers that not only does she have a vampire's incredible physical prowess, she's also inherited Mark's fighting reflexes through the implant. It has also increased her metabolism far beyond normal for a vampire, and her first sexual encounter with Zima, while joyous, drives her to the brink of starvation.

To keep Anne alive, the team split up: Charlie and Mark research how to get her metabolism under control, while Zima and Anne go to an old hotel to gather blood from sleeping occupants. William ambushes them on the way out and tears Zima's head off. Anne launches into a rage but is stopped when William exerts his mental control over her and begins his torturous vengeance. Zima, who is down but still functioning, uses Anne's implant to create a debilitating feedback that forces William to cut his mental link. Anne fights valiantly, but William is too strong. Zima again uses the implant and boosts Anne's metabolism, giving her the strength she needs to defeat William and the rest of his goons. William flees, but Anne is unable to pursue because the metabolic boost has left her completely drained.

Back at the factory and still unable to achieve intimacy with Charlie, Anne confronts the ultimate source of her PTSD—her brother—for the first time in 18 years. She discovers that her brother didn't help her back then because the jocks had threatened to kill her if he interfered, and she disappeared before he could explain. They reconcile in tears, leaving Anne with a clear conscience and banishing the last of her PTSD.

The story ends with Anne and Charlie finally sleeping together.