

8. Speeding

She fiddled with the two wires. They had just sufficient length to snap into the crocodile clips so she could relax a little of the tension in her neck and shoulders. Beads of sweat queued up on her brow, the humidity in her helmet had become thicker over the last twenty minutes. She set the clock for sixty seconds, an analogue one, electronics being yesterday's dream.

Pushing the clock crown, she revolved on her feet and briskly walked away, transitioning into a slow trot in her dark blue suit, black army boots and grey helmet, visor locked down. The car, also a ragtag array of parts and colours, sat on the corrupted tarmac about four hundred metres from her location. The car's boot was open, equipment strewn within it, bottles of water, spare suit parts and another helmet. She slammed the lid down. Pushing open the driver's door, she pivoted and slipped in, closing the door behind herself in a well practised manoeuvre. Approximately fifteen seconds later, there was a muted explosion, the energy from the shaped charge focusing down and inwards.

A second crash as the speed camera fell forward onto the twisted road, mimicking a tree being felled in a sparse forest. In the car she had watched looking through the rear windscreen, protective wire framing the view nicely. 'Yes!!!,' she exclaimed, punching the air. After allowing herself this little celebration, constrained by her suit, she pulled off her helmet atop sweaty, wispy hair. The crackling static continued quietly in her left ear. It was a good day today, high cloud cover and wind taking some of the remaining cloud cover to the west. Possibly time for two more before retiring to her shelter?

She had blown one more camera down, on her way at a fair rate on the rutted road to the last one before turning home. Then a flash from her right, zipping past like a tiny supernova in the low sky, and before she knew it, blue lights and sirens behind her car, gaining rapidly. She ought to have put considerable distance between this surprise pursuer and her, but preternaturally she had noted the sharp nails on a belt ahead, across what purported to be a road these days. Her foot rammed hard on the brakes, the car digging in at the front and rising up at the rear. A one-sided see-saw.

In no time at all, the car with all the lights and sirens was parked behind her, its driver already walking resolutely in high boots to her driver's window. A tap on the reinforced window. She didn't react or respond. Another, more insistent series of raps on the plexiglass and wire. He appeared to be unarmed. Putting her helmet back on, the concealed microphone and speaker flipped on with a tiny gesture of her right gloved hand. The left in good reach for the handle of the revolver and the stock of the shotgun. She pushed a button briefly and the driver's window opened sufficiently to allow sound and very little else. 'Do you realise what speed you were doing, Madam?', asked a tall man all in blue overalls, with a clipped, no nonsense voice. 'Whaaat?!? Are you fucking kidding me, *nutcase*?', she retorted sharply. 'Another fruitcake in the community,' she thought to herself.

'I'd estimate over 100kph, and on a road surface that clearly is unsafe for any more than 30-35,' he said in what sounded like his best admonishing teacher style. Her eyes bugged behind her visor, incredulous. 'That will be two bottles of water or a can of beans, a ticket, two points on your license, and a stiff warning to be more careful in future,' he stated flatly into the intervening space between him and her car. 'You're serious, you're fucking serious. Taken a look round recently?', she muttered loud enough for him to detect it in his earphone, above the constant ticking noise.

As she got out to open the boot, humouring him, proffering two bottles to him, she received a ticket with two points neatly written by hand and his wagging finger lecturing her. Around them the ruins of civilisation, death strewn all over the road and pavements, orange and black clouds high in the clotted sky. She was back in and stressing the accelerator as he cleared the road of harm, his arm waving her off. She kept the car slower, still, but just enough to race to the last speed camera before home. She had marked the street on her map in felt tip, '*Loony here, best avoided.*'