

I pulled up to the red light and sighed. It was late summer, and an unfortunate combination of the hot day and a bad lunch left me feeling ill (or so I thought). A quiet roar rolled through the window of my cabin interrupting my thoughts, and I looked to my right.

'By god!' I thought, 'It's an Impreza! They haven't been in production for 20 years at least.' The tinted passenger window cranked down, and the passenger - a young woman who my late and disapproving aunt would have referred to as "riff-raff" - indicated that I should do the same. I eyed her up as I rolled down my own window. Around twenty, with dyed red hair, a visible neck tattoo, dark shades, and a shirt so transparent it could make a man blush. "Oi mister!" she called, deviant smile glittering in her face, "what's the chance that you'll show my man here," - she turned around and banged the roof of the car to indicate the driver - "that his shitty Impreza can't beat a real car." Normally, I wouldn't bother with such a challenge - I enjoy living without a criminal conviction. But that day, some inhibition in me collapsed.

I paused for a second while I eyed up her car. "Aw, why the hell not?" I shot back after a few seconds. "First to the Brock Street intersection wins. Start on the green. Et cetera, et cetera." I may have just agreed to a street race, but don't let that fool you. I was no idiot. Have you ever heard of that old military phrase: *never attack without a 3:1 advantage*? Well, I whilst I eyed up their car I came to the conclusion that I had at least three times more horsepower - it was going to be a pushover.

Confident in my ability, I called out again. "What's the prize, mate? Besides shaming your man, that is." That strangely alluring smile dipped from her face as she thought for a second. "Tell you what," she began, "if we win..." I nodded at her, egging her on. "We do a swap. You get this old thing," - she banged the top again to the muffled sound of displeasure from the proud owner within - "and we get your Audi." she smiled at me again, egging *me* on this time. I looked at her eyes, and almost refused right there and then. There was a bit of cunning hidden there, a cunning that she knew was usually hidden, but had slipped out in that very moment. I had a strange feeling that she knew something I didn't. "And if you win," she started again, clearly seeing my hesitation, "you get..."

"You," I interrupted. "you ditch your man for an evening and take me out on a date."

Her smile dropped again as she considered the offer. She eyed me up carefully, and then nodded, reaching over to shake my hand. I locked her gaze, but the cunning was gone, hidden again. The attractive girl was back in front, and she was ready to race.

We leaned back into our respective cars, and concentrated on the lights above. In retrospect, I should have wondered how "*her man*" had consented to such a deal given that it was surely the two most prized aspects of *his* life that were on the table. But such things didn't seem to matter at that time. It was simply the race and I. My mind wandered to that flash of cunning, the neck tattoo and the transparent shirt. Unease grew on top of the sickness in the pit of my stomach. There was something wrong here - but what?

The light flashed green, and I gunned it. Afterwards I counted my lucky stars that Calfor Boulevard - our impromptu race track - was so wide and empty, as I'm not sure that I would

have been able to drive quite so well on one of the thin, winding roads that cover most of the city. While I approached the few cars out and about on that sleepy Sunday I looked to my right to see how close the Subaru was. *Scarily close* was the answer. My unease grew more. I thought for sure that I'd have the power advantage, but clearly they had modded the thing more than first glance revealed. I almost considered using my secret weapon there and then, but held off. There was some traffic ahead that required my utmost attention, and I wasn't sure that I could do the lane-changes with it on.

I zipped past a '25 Swift, danced behind a '29 Commodore and narrowly avoided a '17 Model S - thanking the gods that I hadn't collided with a vintage model that beautiful. I lost sight of the Impreza during that sequence, but I was confident that it couldn't have nailed those lane changes quite as well as I had. I moved into the right hand lane to avoid an 18 wheeler before quickly gliding back into the centre. I looked in the rear-view mirror to see how far behind my opponent was, before receiving the shock of my life: it wasn't there. I looked ahead again, and saw it at least fifty metres in front!

Now I decided; I would use my secret. The Subaru wasn't the only modded vehicle in the race, and now she would see that. As a fan of the Bond series with a fair bit of cash in the bank, I had decided upon purchasing my car that I would have a sleek turbo built in to the engine, with a switch under the gear lever's top - classic. I flicked open my hidden gem, and without further adieu, gave the switch there the same treatment. The car surged forward rapidly, and with a little bit of lane work, I was level with the Impreza, (the edge of my bonnet slightly ahead of theirs, naturally) matching its speed exactly. I opened my windows and in an echo of our first meeting, gestured that the passenger of the Impreza do the same. An intersection passed by as it lowered. She leaned out of the window. "So you stopped sandbagging then, did you old man?" she called, the wind snatching at her words. Emboldened further by the empty road ahead I leaned out my window, caught her gaze, and blew her a kiss. I dipped back inside and was about to gun it when I heard her laugh. Unease returned. I looked back at the Impreza, and she caught my gaze. "We will too then!" she called, before blowing my kiss right back at me and lurching forward so fast that I barely had time to register that there was an intersection right ahead.

The Impreza roared across the lights and a few seconds later, I followed (how we got lucky enough to not hit anyone, I don't know.) We immediately slowed down, and pulled into a carpark, stopping next to each other. We opened our respective doors, and faced each other properly (my head was swimming now). She was a few inches shorter than myself at 5'9", but she carried herself with more grace than I could have managed in a lifetime. The sun glistened on her tat', and the wind blew about her hair. "So. That's that then," she chuckled, smiling. "You've lost, we've won, and a deal is a deal." I looked at her gravely for a second then burst out laughing. I was glad to see her smile dip. "What's so funny, bud?" she asked. I wiped the tears from my eyes. "You're right about a deal being a deal, but I'm afraid that you're wrong about the winner." I pointed to the lights. "This is Wrex Street. Brock is about four hundred and fifty metres back, and we passed it when we were having that little chat. If you'll remember, my

bonnet was slightly ahead of yours. I crossed the line first and therefore," I sunk to one knee and mockingly bowed my head, "I believe that you and I have a date for tomorrow evening."

Scowling, she backed away from me and jumped into her car. I had just enough time before she slammed the door to see that it was not "*her man*" in the driver's seat at all. It was empty. She had a 'bot! The cheat! The 'bot flawlessly backed the car out of the park and drove away whilst I stood dumbfounded on the asphalt.

As one would expect however, you can't plow down the city's main drag at a ridiculous speed without being caught. The police soon showed up and took me away. I blew a 0.12. The sentence was kinder when I proved I had auto-brewery syndrome - that explained my sickness and inhibition collapse. But I still faced a *long* time on public transport, I tell you. I never saw the scammer again, but I like to think that by now she's on to a '26 Veyron *at least*.