

Wrecked

“Call Emma.”

Calling Emma responds the car’s voice recognition system.

I overtake a triple road train, swerve back into the lane and slam on the brakes to turn left onto Goldfields Highway, tap my fingers on the steering wheel, wait for her to answer. *Please be home.*

“Sorry. Had the phone on charge.” Emma’s voice comes through the speakers. “What’s up?”

I let out the breath I hadn’t been aware of holding. “Should I start with Matthew telling Jacqui it’s OK that she’s dropping out of her fourth course in less than two years? Or that he’s already told his mother we’ll go to her place for Christmas? Or that he’s fine with Jacqui’s loser boyfriend staying over? He never listens to me.” I bang my fist against the padded door.

“Uh oh. You’re at the ‘Matthew’ stage. Must be bad.”

“They ambushed me over dinner,” said through gritted teeth. “Must’ve rehearsed what they’d say earlier.”

“Do you need me to help dispose of the bodies?”

I let out a short laugh. “I left them with the dishes. That’ll kill them.” I veer around a dead kangaroo in the middle of the road.

“Housework nearly kills me on a regular basis.” Emma’s sigh crackles out of the speaker. “You want me to talk to Jacqui?”

“Don’t know. I’ve had enough. Just needed to get away. I left about 10 minutes ago, so should be in Kalg in just under half-an-hour.” I glance at the dashboard; realise I’ve dropped speed while talking and push the accelerator.

“I’ll have the wine waiting.”

“Thanks.” I end the call. Katy Perry picks up singing ‘Roar’ and I join in at top volume. High beams bounce off cats-eyes and guideposts as I scan for roos. *It’s good Jacqui and Matt get on; good her dad is in her corner. But my husband should*

be on my side too. I mean, he didn't even discuss Christmas before telling his mother...

Something pings off the passenger side of the car. Tiny ricochets. *Gravel. Shit!* I yank the steering wheel to the right. Back wheels slide. All moisture leaves my mouth, impossible to swallow. Hair stands up on my arms and tingle, buzzing electric shocks, run over my entire body. A guidepost disappears under the bonnet. Jolt as the car enters a shallow ditch alongside the highway, then cruise through the air coming up the other side.

I knew that one day I would die.

Thrown against the door, airbag deploys pushing my head back when the car slams into the ground. Headlights illuminate low shrubs rushing past. Foot won't lift off the accelerator.

Nobody gets out of life alive.

My heart beats so fast it shudders. Breathe rushes in, doesn't appear to release out. Nauseous. Stomach flips. Dizzy.

But I never thought that it was going to be today.

The car smashes into a eucalypt with an incredibly loud tearing and crunch of metal that echoes in my head. Jar to a stop. My soul is flung from my body. Glass shatters and rains everywhere. Spinning tyres flick dirt up, spraying against the door and through the broken window. The seatbelt digs into my shoulder and abdomen.

I assumed I'd have a tomorrow.

A burnt chemical smell hovers above the airbag. Overlaid by the sweet smell of coolant dripping from the cracked radiator. An oily taste hangs in the air. I reach out to turn off the engine, but my right arm doesn't move. I force myself to release the steering wheel one finger at a time, lean over and twist the key with my left hand. The sudden silence shrieks in my ears. Disorientating.

Not a true assumption. It can end this quickly...

No!

I push aside the airbag. *Need to get out.* The seatbelt won't undo. *Jammed.* Panic rises. Breath won't enter my lungs, my stomach sloshes around and small tremors become whole-body shudders. *Strange; there's no blood, no pain, but can't breathe.* I grope in my bag and pull out my phone. 000.

What is your emergency?

"Car accident." Wheeze out the words.

Are there any injuries?

"Can't breathe. Can't move."

Is there anyone else involved?

"No. Don't know where. Between Kambalda and Kalgoorlie." Gulp in a small breath.

We've got your location. We're coming to you with lights and sirens. Stay on the line with me.

Matt. I hang up. Call him.

"Hi. This is Matthew. Please leave a message and I'll get back to you."

Screening. Obviously still too pissed to pick up my call.

"Matt. It's Sammi... Accident. So sorry. Didn't mean it." Drag in a breath. "Make sure Jacqui finishes her course." Squirm to take pressure off my right shoulder. "Don't care about her boyfriend." Tears run down my face, their saltiness pools in my mouth. "Didn't kiss you goodbye... So sorry." Gulp in air. "Love you. Sorry. Whatever you..." The phone slips out of my hand. Lean to pick it up, the jammed seatbelt holds me in place. Suffocating. Ease back.

I listen for the sound of rescue. *What if nobody finds me?* Swish of the occasional car on the highway. *Why don't they stop and help? How far off the road am I that they don't see me?* I swipe my hand over my stinging cheek, come away with smears of blood on my palm. Again, try to unbuckle the seatbelt. Nothing moves. Pressure increases in my shoulder, chest tightens. *Help me.* Wriggle to find a more comfortable position. *Bet they've left the dishes in the sink for me. Jacqui, Matt, I'm sorry for everything I didn't do. Please forgive me.*

My stomach roils. I swallow the vomit flooding into my mouth. Breathe past the discomfort. Tug uselessly at the seatbelt. Sweat drips down my back with the effort. Shiver from the cold coating my skin. Faint sirens in the distance. *I'm here.* Focus on the sound... coming closer... and closer. Sirens cut off. Crunch of tyres on the gravel verge. Blue and red lights slash through the dark.

Rustle of footsteps on dead leaves approach. "Miss, can you hear me?" A uniformed police officer peers in the broken window.

"Yes." I struggle to sit straighter.

"Don't move. We'll get you out." He tugs at the handle. The jostle reverberates through me, but the door doesn't open. "What's your name?"

"Sammi. Samantha." I cradle my right shoulder in my left hand, trying to ease the pain. Pressure in my chest builds. I let my hand fall away.

"Stay still." The officer reaches in and removes the key from the ignition. "Fire and rescue are coming. Wait until the ambos arrive and check you over before shifting. You could be more injured than you realise." He walks around the car and opens the passenger door. "Just keep calm. They're about five minutes away."

"Ring Matt." I gesture to where my phone fell. "Need to talk to him." *Will he pick up? It's less than an hour since I stalked out; not enough time for him to cool down after the argument. If I could take back every nasty word I threw at him, I would. Didn't even kiss him goodbye. Now it's too late.* As dizziness overtakes me my head lolls forward.

"You can ring him later. We need to focus on you now." The officer eases my head up with one hand and calls for urgent assistance on his radio with the other, voice fading away as darkness edges into my consciousness. "Stay awake." He glances out the back window when another vehicle pulls up.

"Sammi. Sweetheart." Matt's voice cuts through the fog. I smile. *He'd heard. Listened. Come.*