



Human Crash Test Dummy

"What's your sign?" He asked, eyebrows arched.

"It's a stop sign. So belt up, I have a boyfriend." Indicated Minnie.

"Oh. Sorry." Clarified Cam. "I wasn't trying to pick you up, you see, just torque. I'm no oily grease-ball; I just have an interest in astronomy."

"Isn't it -ology?" She asked.

"Whatever it is, I know it's an Astra." He shrugged rugged hard shoulders. Minnie laughed.

"Ok, then. Mine's a Gemini. Look, here's my Austin now." Wheeling around at his return, as she stopped being the cup-holder, turning it over to him.

Cameron had to repeat himself, as he so often did when meeting new people at parties.

"Cam Schaaft." He proffered a hand-signal and Austin shook it, pumping vigorously.

"I'm a human crash-test dummy at the CCC; the triple C; the Checksafe Collision Centre." Cam yelled, above the music, but was so proud of that sentence that he plugged it as often as he could, not caring who may be horning in on the conversation.

"They call me the Cam-ikaze."

"Pleased to meet you. I'm Austin Ayfore... Tea?"

"No thanks. I don't drink tea at a party, unless it's a..."

"Model Tea Party?" Austin stuck his nose out a little.

"No, no, unless it's dry." Cam cut him off.

"Anyway, your job, is that...?"

"Yep, exactly as it sounds." Cam thought of himself as valiant, excelling in his role of being a guinea-pig for such an important industry.

"I sit in a new- or prototype- car with stickers and these tacky quartered-coloured ball things stuck to my body and head and they train half-a-dozen or a dozen slow-mo cameras on me. Then they green-light me; crashing the car into another one or a wall at a pre-determined speed. I can withstand up to nine hyphens per paragraph or ten g's of force before I even come close to blacking out. They're the same forces a jet-fighter pilot has to withstand."

"Ten em gee's... sorry, ten g's, M." Austin was impressed, nudging his girlfriend.

Cam revved himself up, adding with considerable pride, "most people can only keep all their faculties up to somewhere between three and six times the force of gravity



before they break down and stain their undercarriages. That's little more than a fast, jerky roller-coaster ride."

"Wow", said Minnie Cooper, Austin's girlfriend and shotgun-rider, now clutching his arm. "That sounds exciting."

Cam took a moment to look her over afresh. She was of similar vintage to Austin. Well-maintained, with no dents in the bodywork. A nice representative, if not showroom model, with modern pinstripes. Diesels, not too many k's on the clock and a new, sensible set of matt-black boots, slung close to the ground. Smart, sassy, no-nonsense, regularly serviced, well garaged and low maintenance, by the look of her.

He knew better than to ask about the airbags though. They didn't seem to be the original factory-fitted type; rather, an after-market addition.

"So, Cam. Tell me, what bones have you broken?" Austin wanted to know.

"Whew, lots! Where do I start? Let's see." Pondered the Cam-ikaze.

Cam Schaaft's mental cogs spun up to speed, then he began an anatomy lesson, indicating injured areas as he willingly gave way to the showy side of his nature. He started by pointing down at his Vans.

"Stripped bark off my shins and knees so often that CSI could get my DNA from any gravelled surface in the country, I reckon. Then there was a compound fracture in my right forearm and left collarbone when I was eight. I was one of three in a tree at the time, and I was the one who dropped out. A shoulder re-construction after a traumatic season on-field."

"The football field?" Ventured Minnie.

"No, Sally Field." He mentally reversed into a tight spot.

"I had an ex-girlfriend once who made me sit through thirteen episodes straight of *Brothers and Sisters* back-to-back one rainy weekend. She wouldn't let me leave the living room – crash-tackling me as I tried to escape for a quick pit-stop. Dead end."

Cam winced at the memory as he took a sip of his ethanol. "I've also dislocated most of my fingers and cracked a few ribs."

Austin caught Tsiu Do Koo, the hostess's, eye and gestured for a refuel, strategically placing his empty glass on the tray-top as she approached. "Bee-ute! Tah, love."

"Oh, and my nose too." Cam radiated coolness. "There was a case of mistaken identity at the footy last year. Some clown's right hook – turned straight into it. He came off second-best, but. Sent him off to the wreckers."

"What about at work?"

"What about work?" Cam looked at him like he was a couple of seats short of a Tarago.

"Any breaks at work?" Asked Austin.



"No, don't be silly! There aren't any brakes in a controlled collision! That defeats the purpose of crashing the cars in the first place."

"Sorry, I think Austin meant breaks. Didn't you darling? Cam, re-think. Have you had any breaks at work?" A driven Minnie felt obliged to help out, to prevent the conversation from stalling, yet found it difficult to suppress a smile.

"Ah! Breaks! Sorry, I couldn't hear how you were spelling it. Of course there are breaks at work. The union demands that we all get plenty of breaks." As the other two gaped like stunned mullets, Kamikaze Cam took a long, slow pull from his glass before slowly adding, "yeah, I get a coffee break in the morning and then an hour for lunch every day."

Austin felt exhausted all of a sudden, and Minnie muffled a laugh as Cam ploughed on, relentless. "We have no truck with you; all we are trying to find out is if you've broken anything at work?"

"What, like my bosses favourite coffee mug?"

"No! Cam, stop! Red light. Look, have you ever broken any bones – at work?" Austin felt like going hard on the throttle, applying the choke – was this bloke *really* a hippie short of a Kombi-van?

"Oh!" A confused Cam was feeling like they had shifted straight from first into fourth gear; he was lost in a roundabout conversation, looking for an exit – or at least a sign. Talks were close to breaking down... then realisation slammed into him

The penny-farthing dropped.

"No, touch wood. I've never broken anything at work. And especially *not* my bosses favourite coffee mug." Added Cam, trying to absorb the shock. "It fell off the bench. All by itself."

He couldn't help but look a little shifty, trying desperately to steer the conversation to a quiet side-street.

The party laboured on. Music cranked, people crunked, drank and drunk.

Finally, all signs pointed one way. Traffic was headed home – a bottleneck was emerging as everyone headed towards the same exit. One couple looked dangerously close to merging, right there and then; fodder for the rubber-neckers on the horn.

He saw people exchanging details at the front door. "Hold on, Cam, our daughter and dat son of ours; dey're both sick." Said Nim.

The hosts' two children, Tsiu Do Eff and Rin, were recovering from the flu and were consequently fast asleep at their grandmothers'.

Tsiu Do Nim, an actor-slash-writer (Cam wasn't sure of his stage name) was still cracking someone else's jokes to his departing guests. Koo, his long-suffering wife beside him. An attractive, highly engaging, mysterious yet very approachable everyday woman, a colleague of Cam's at the Checksafe Collision Centre. Tsiu Do Koo was one whom people found difficult to work out.



Still, an amiable and affable couple, exceptionally reliant Korean imports. Which meant it was always pretty easy to find a Park.

"We're just going to do a fast lap of the party, give kudos to the Tsiu Do's, then lay some rubber, make tracks out of here." Explained Minnie. "Cam, do you want a lift anywhere?"

"Oh, no thanks, don't want to bug you. I don't think I'm going your way anyway – I'm a pedestrian as always tonight, heading for the train station. You see, I only ever do public transport if I can help it."

"Really? The train station has got to be over two kilometres from here." Austin countered.

"And it's on the way for us." Offered Minnie. "It's no trouble."

"That's really very nice of you, I value; appreciate the thought." Said Cam. "But I'll still walk, if it's all the same to you. I really don't like to sit in cars, to be honest. It reminds me of work and makes me a little jumpy."

