

WINTOUR'S GAME

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LONDON



1

OUT LATE ON A SCHOOL NIGHT

With a click and a swish of night, Alex was in. And she had just two minutes to get back out again.

No problem.

All around her in the darkness, the warehouse hummed, the air thick with oil and industry. Making her way nimbly down the aisle, lights winked at her in the gloom, while the massive machines that towered over her chirruped and sighed as she passed. She was so busy wondering what they made here that it took her a moment to realise she wasn't the only thing out of place.

There was something about this room, something about this whole building, in fact, that made her senses prickly. Something just felt ... *wrong*.

At fourteen, Alex Wintour was pretty young for a thief, especially one with a reputation like hers. Short and lithe, with sharp features and a sharper tongue, her talents among Roz's crew were undisputed. As always on a work night, she was wearing her black jeans, her lucky black biker jacket, and her fringe of auburn hair with its tips

of midnight blue was tucked beneath a black beanie, so it didn't dangle in front of her face like it usually did.

She'd been given everything she'd need: access codes for the doors, a floor plan of the building, even a big red X marking her target. This job should've been a piece of cake.

So why did she feel so uneasy?

Alex stopped, scanning the room, willing her senses to see round corners. Nothing. She tapped her watch, the timer telling her she'd already wasted thirty seconds, so, with a grimace, she pushed the persistent niggle to the back of her mind and moved on.

She made her way quickly towards her target, the control room perched up a set of metal stairs in the back corner. Taking the steps lightly, two at a time, she punched the code she'd been given into the keypad and the door hissed open, revealing the operations for the entire plant. Fixing an extendable steel rod into position across the doorway, Alex cautiously stepped into the room.

Banks of idling consoles winked to her left, stationed beneath windows looking out on to the sleeping facility, but she ignored them, finding what she was looking for on the back wall.

Lined up, row upon row, was a collection of spotlight glass cylinders, each containing a range of indecipherable tech. Her hand traced the middle row of the numbered thirty-centimetre-long containers until she found the one she was after. Inside it, on a small clear plinth, was a nondescript chrome device about the size of a cigarette lighter, with a round blue button at one end. In this room, surrounded by so much imposing technology, it seemed decidedly unimpressive, but it wasn't Alex's job to judge what Roz's

clients wanted stolen or why.

So, slipping a piece of clear plastic the size of a postage stamp from her pocket, Alex peeled away the protective backing and laid it on the fingerprint scanner. Flashing green, the clasps holding the cylinder released it into Alex's gloved hands with a satisfying hiss.

"Oops-a-daisy," she said, casually hurling the container to the floor where it shattered at her feet. Its contents tumbled across the scuffed linoleum, coming to rest by the foot of a battered but orderly desk. As Alex bent to retrieve the device, something on the desktop glinted in the darkness, catching her eye.

It looked like a postcard, but it was black, and embossed in the centre was a large golden T. Beneath that, more gold lettering glittered, forming alien patterns that Alex couldn't decipher and she moved on with a disgruntled huff.

A framed photograph sat next to it of a woodland trail and what she presumed was a family of seven smiling hikers, in descending height, huddled together. All brown skin and bright, brilliant smiles, they were like Russian dolls. Dad in the middle looked proud as punch of his five miniatures, while Mum, though central, appeared somewhat detached, as if above it all.

Alex gave a derisive snort. "Bet they hate each other."

Happy family days out were not something she saw in her future. Roz's operation, the only family she knew, didn't exactly go for picnics in the park.

She scanned the rest of the desk's cluttered surface for anything of interest, but the blueprints and diagrams held no value. Besides, even if Alex had wanted to take any of

this stuff, Roz's instructions had been clear.

Turning to leave, she stepped on a piece of curved glass, one end crunching under her foot, propelling the jagged point of the other into the fleshy part of her ankle.

Pain roared up Alex's leg and she cried out, more startled than hurt. But it was enough to throw her off balance and send one hand flailing. The device, clutched in her fist, hit the closest cylinder with a smart *clink*, sending a crack across its surface. And she didn't need a crystal ball to know what would happen next.

!!WHAP!! !!WHAP!! !!WHAP!! !!WHAP!!

The room exploded in a blinding flash as security lights burst into life. Alex reeled at the sudden brilliance, then, just as she was recovering from the shock, white smoke billowed into the room, quilting it in an instant.

Eyes tearing up, and with smoke filling her mouth, nose and ears, Alex bounded for the door, slithering through just before the rod she'd placed there gave way. The door slammed shut behind her with a disgruntled crunch.

Tripping the alarm had filled the entire plant with a howling siren and the same thick white smoke, and Alex descended the metal staircase into the toxic cloud, coughing and blinking away tears. Dropping the chrome device into her backpack, she whipped off her beanie, covering her mouth and nose, and squinted into the glare. She tried to identify any shape or landmark that could lead her back to the outside world, but everywhere she looked it was the same: a disorientating white-out with hellish red flashes.

She'd been in tighter spots than this, but her innate ability to sniff out an escape route, and an almost sixth

sense for knowing what could be, and often *was*, lying in wait round the corner, had always seen her through.

Alex couldn't explain this ability and she tried not to think about it. But she knew she'd come to rely on it. Which was a shame. Because for some reason it had completely abandoned her now.

Typical.

With light, noise and smoke assaulting her senses, Alex stumbled across the factory floor, hoping she was heading in the direction of the exit. The avenues between the machines were wide and straight, and, even though her sixth sense was failing her, she still had a reasonable picture of the place in her mind. So, pushing back her panic, hands groping at the space in front of her, Alex gritted her teeth and struggled back the way she had come.

Finally, a ghostly green glow floated through the murk. The emergency exit light materialised on the wall before her, a door appearing beneath. Then the keypad was at her trembling fingers.

Jabbing in the code, the door swung open, expelling Alex and a gush of smoke into the glittering dark, where she hit the railing, gasping and coughing at the shock of cool night air. She could hear sirens approaching, but she ignored them. Because, as soon as she was outside, her sixth sense suddenly returned and her mind lit up.

ENGINE
The engine VYRUUMMS into life ...

but—

Wait! I

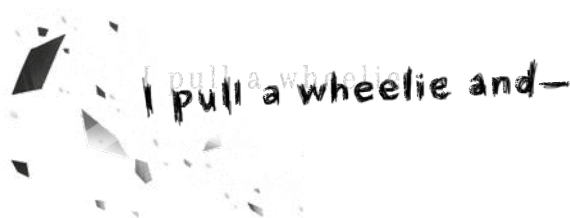
haven't turned the
key yet—

Alex blinked her streaming eyes clear and peered into the shadowy yard that lay in front of the warehouse. Nothing moved. Her motorbike was still at the bottom of the steps where she'd left it. But, glancing at the gate, she could see that the padlock she'd removed so that she could make a quick getaway had been replaced. And *was* that an engine she could hear beneath the wail of approaching sirens?

No point in waiting to find out.

Alex was already halfway down the steps when headlights pinned her startled shadow against the wall. She couldn't tell how many there were, but her silhouette fractured as the bikes emerged from the dark, scrambling noisily across the yard towards her.

Throwing a leg over her bike, she rammed on her helmet and, with a twist of her wrist, the machine roared. She cleared the yard in under a second, her mind ablaze with questions she had no time to answer as she hurtled towards the padlocked gate. The chain was at head height and if she tried to barge through it'd be curtains. But maybe...



Two metres out, Alex kicked down a gear and pulled hard on the handles, lifting the front wheel off the ground and catching the lock. With a spark and a satisfying *clang*, the gate sprang open and she careered through, whooping triumphantly and vanishing up the alley in a streak of red tail lights.



Even at this time of the morning, the streets were alive and cars sped by Alex in a dizzying blur. Behind her, she could hear the muffled roar of her pursuers approaching fast. They weren't giving up that easily, but Alex still had a few tricks up her sleeve.

Ahead, the traffic was beginning to slow at a red light and, with a wolfish grin, she gunned the engine and sped straight into the heart of the busy intersection.

**Blue van, white BMW.
left, right and
I'm through.**

Tyres shrieked, horns blared and alarmed voices clamoured behind her as she mounted the roundabout and sped through the junction. Swerving to avoid the blue van before she even saw it, Alex pulled the bike hard to the left just as a white BMW skimmed past close enough for her to feel the hot breath of its wake. She was already out the other side when she heard the telltale chorus of squealing brakes, cries of panic and a metallic crunch behind her. One down...

She allowed herself a smile as she sped away, but the flashes in her mirror told her that she wasn't out of the woods yet. Her two remaining pursuers were close behind and getting closer.

mmmmNNNNEEEEEAAAAOOOOOOWwww

Hitting the river, she opened the throttle, screaming

across the bridge and into another busy intersection, senses straining to stay one step ahead. She sped through lanes of interweaving traffic and...



ALEX WINTOUR
Alex Wintour.

Welcome
to your future!

Wait, what was *that*?

Her mind only wandered for an instant. But that was all it took.

A 4x4 she hadn't seen coming clipped her back wheel and the tyre exploded. Alex lost control and the bike tore wildly across the tarmac, leaving a trail of sparks in its wake. Early morning pedestrians flung themselves out of the way as she clipped the kerb and slammed into a bollard at full speed, thrown from the bike as it folded beneath her like a paper clip. Sailing through the air, Alex hit the nearest wall, clattered into an alley and landed with a wounded, winded grunt.

The world reeled before her, reluctantly edging back into focus as she sat up, pulling off her helmet and letting it clatter at her feet. A few metres away, her beloved bike was a smouldering wreck, but by some miracle she was alive and, flexing her trembling fingers, appeared to be unhurt. Still too stunned to stand, Alex could only watch as the two remaining motorbikes snaked towards her through the bewildered crowds and smoking pile-up she'd left behind. The riders stopped, taking obvious relish in parking by the steaming wreckage of Alex's bike. The closest one removed

his helmet, revealing a slack-jawed thug in his twenties with a shaved head and a waxen pallor. Sunken-eyed and sneering, he fixed a white earbud into one ear and opened his mouth to speak.

**A black porsche 718 appears
nowhere, screaming
out of
up the lane.
THUNK! and
THUNK!
completely takes them out.**

“Huh,” murmured Alex as her pursuers were lit up by the headlights of a sleek black Porsche hurtling towards them up the alley without any apparent intention of stopping.

At the last second, the car spun, skidding in a tight arc. It either didn't see the two riders or it didn't care. Either way, it didn't stop. The back of the car struck them both with a meaty slap, throwing them spreadeagled on top of their bikes, and then shuddered to a halt only metres from where Alex sat.

It remained there a moment, motionless, engine purring like a satisfied cat, before the passenger side door was thrown open to reveal a teenage boy. Ignoring Alex, his slender frame sprang out lightly and he began buffing the spot where the riders had struck the panelling.

After a moment, apparently satisfied, he turned to Alex with a relieved whistle. A tumble of chestnut hair fell in carefully choreographed chaos off a pale, narrow face and

he smiled a little too easily. His dark brown eyes twinkled at her in the gloom.

“Alex! So nice to finally meet you!” he said, pocketing the cloth and extending his hand towards her. “I’m Colman Reece.”

“*Colman?*”

Alex knew the type. A moneyed, privately educated trust-fund brat. The box-fresh trainers, dark trousers and white T-shirt that he wore beneath a navy three-quarter-length jacket reeked of humblebrag wealth. And his hands hadn’t seen a day’s work in their short, privileged life.

“Friends call me Cole,” he said breezily.

She smiled back tightly, making no effort to mask her distaste. “Colman it is then.”

“Oh, we’re gonna be mates, I can tell!” he said, beaming at her, and Alex wanted to reach up and slap the smile off him. If only she had the energy. Nor did she take his proffered hand and, perhaps sensing her hostility, the boy retreated back towards the idling car.

“Get in,” he said, pulling back the passenger seat and waving inside, “and I promise I’ll change your life forever.”

Alex surveyed the carnage all around them. The angry drivers, the unconscious motorbike riders, the approaching sirens and the cocky teenager in the pimped-out Porsche offering her a lift. How had she not seen this coming?

But that didn’t matter right now. She needed to get out of there. Fast.

“No thanks, *Colman*,” she said. “Think I’ll take the bus.”



2

COLE

Alex winced. Standing unsteadily, she sidestepped the bikes and their stricken riders. Picking her way through them still seemed preferable to jumping into a car with a complete stranger, no matter how helpful he'd just been. Cole was still watching her patiently, smiling as if he already knew exactly how this would all play out, and it made her want to slap the smile off him even more.

But how had he known her name? And what did he mean that it was nice to *finally meet her*?

Despite herself, she found a hundred other questions bubbling up too and stalled, ignoring the urgency of the approaching sirens.

"Did Roz Enright send you?" she asked, trying not to sound too invested in the answer.

"Uhhh, sure," said Cole unsurely. "Why don't you get in and I'll tell you everything you want to know."

"Yeah, thought so," Alex replied. "You're full of it."

Curiosity satisfied, she began limping away. Sending help wasn't her boss's style. Roz took more of a *leave-you-*

bleeding-in-the-gutter-and-you'd-better-not-talk-to-the-cops approach. If this Richie Rich was going to lie straight out of the gate, she had places to be.

The familiar roar of an engine, however, stopped Alex in her tracks.

Silhouetted by the carnage she'd created in the junction, the third rider idled at the top of the lane, blankly surveying the scene. He spotted Alex, gunned his engine and came charging.

With a grimace, she glanced at the car to find Cole was still holding the seat back for her.

"Offer still stands," he said calmly.

Alex groaned and, returning Cole's grin with a glower, scrambled into the car's blood-red leather interior.

Before the door was even shut, the driver took off with enough force to pin Alex against the upholstery, throwing her about the Porsche's tiny back seat like a rag doll. It sped through the narrow, winding streets, the whine of the chasing motorbike growing louder.

Struggling to right herself, she fumbled her seat belt into its catch, but she was barely aware of what she was doing. From the minute she'd stepped inside that warehouse, her night had gone from bad to worse. And now this guy. Showing up out of nowhere, right when she needed him. Alex wanted answers but she didn't even know what to ask.

"Who the hell *are* you clowns?"

It seemed like a good place to start.

"Like I said, I'm *Cole*, and this is Tana," Cole said, gesturing at the driver, who Alex realised she'd barely registered before now. How had she missed him? A massive, broad-shouldered Māori in a black suit was almost

comically stuffed into the driver's seat. The sides of his head were shaved, with a mullet of thick black hair cut to his shoulders. His face was a mask of tattoos, one arching over his eyebrows and another running from his lower lip underneath his chin. Their eyes met briefly in the rear-view mirror and his searching, no-nonsense glare pierced her before returning to the road.

"He doesn't talk much," explained Cole.

"Really? I had you pegged as the quiet one," replied Alex.

Cole's witty retort was lost beneath the sudden howl of a motorbike.

"Aw, this guy again?" snapped Cole. "OK, Tana, he'll go left if we split right ... *now*."

"Wait, that's the *aaaaaaeeeaaahhh*!" wailed Alex, pulling her knees up as Tana ploughed into the oncoming lane.

Horns blared and headlights flashed, the traffic swerving wildly in every direction to avoid them. But it put a stalled line of vehicles between them and the motorbike, and the gap opened further when Tana screeched down a narrow side street, leaving the pandemonium behind.

"Take a left here," Cole said, directing them down an alley. "And kill the lights; he'll drive right by."

Tana did as instructed, skidding the car to a juddering halt. With the lights off, the night rushed in.

"Lemme out! Lemme out!" demanded Alex, scrabbling for the handle in the dark, but finding the door firmly locked.

"One second," Cole said. Finger aloft, he looked past her out of the back window. "Here he comes."

The night lit up again, fading just as quickly as the rider roared past without turning to follow.

“And there he goes,” said Cole chirpily.

“OK, great,” Alex hissed, yanking on the door handle harder than was strictly necessary. “You can let me out now.”

Cole cut her off. “Actually, we’ve got about ten seconds before he discovers he’s lost us, so if you could just bear with us a little bit longer, Alex, that’d be great. Let’s go, Tan.”

Alex scrambled for a handhold. “*Nonononononono!*”

The car rocketed out of the alley and back on to the street where Tana finally, mercifully, slowed to a crawl, blending them into the morning’s growing swarm of commuters.

For the first time since she could remember, Alex was stunned into silence.

“So,” said Cole, turning to face her, “I imagine you have a few questions.”

Alex had so many questions that trying to voice them was like forcing sumo wrestlers through a cat flap.

“What the hell is going on?” she blurted finally. “Who *are* you people?” Confusion and shock had given way to righteous, indignant fury. “You know what? I don’t care! Just let me out. I can walk from here.”

Letting out a defeated, disappointed sigh, Cole simply nodded. “Fair enough.”

Tana pulled the car to the kerb and Alex was readying herself for a speedy exit when Cole spoke, meeting her parting glance in the mirror.

“Kind of surprised you didn’t see this all coming though,” he said.

Alex could sense the bait on the end of the line. But the question still made her pause, one foot hovering over the tarmac.

As a rule, Alex kept her cards close to her chest and her secrets *secret*, especially this one. There was simply no way

he could know. And yet, she told herself, Cole definitely knew *something*.

“Get back in the car, Alex,” he said, addressing her as if she were a crystal vase that would shatter at the slightest mishandling. “And I’ll explain *everything*.”

So far, her night had been nothing but one long trail of question marks. Maybe that highly slappable face actually held some answers. So, with deliberate slowness, Alex settled back in her seat.

“You have one minute,” she said, her voice steady as her heart raced. “Speak.”

“This may be a lot to take in,” Cole replied. “Maybe we could go somewhere and—”

“Fifty seconds,” said Alex, reaching for the door.

“OK, OK! Hear me out!” he said quickly, his machismo evaporating with alarming ease. “Let me guess,” he said, choosing his words carefully. “For years, you’ve seen flashes. At first, they made no sense but, after a while, you realised that what you saw in your head you’d see again. Except this time it would be happening *in front* of you. And you understood that they weren’t memories, or déjà vu. *It was the future.*”

Alex tried desperately to keep her expression neutral, but inside her world had shrunk to the size of an atom, then detonated, the mushroom cloud forming into a sky-high exclamation.

She clenched her jaw to stop it from dropping open and Cole looked at his watch.

“My minute’s almost up,” he said. “Should I continue?”

Alex caught Tana’s glimpse at her in the rear-view and stiffened. A voice inside her was screaming to get out of

there, but she knew she was going to ignore it. Somehow this boy had plucked her innermost secret out of her like it was written on her T-shirt, and she needed to know how.

So, sighing tightly, she said nothing, which Cole apparently took as a yes.

“We call them projections,” he went on. “And you’re not crazy, Alex. That *is* the future you’re seeing. Useful skill for a thief, to be fair. Right now the projections probably come to you just before they happen though, right? Well, where’s the fun in that?”

Their eyes met and Cole actually chuckled.

“What if I could train you to see further?” he said, his eyes glittering mischievously. “Hours. Days. Weeks. Does that sound like something you might be interested in?”

But Alex had stopped listening. Everything Cole had said suddenly fell away into nothing, leaving only one word glittering like a diamond in a mine.

“What do you mean ... *we*?”

He smiled back almost sympathetically. “You thought you were the only one?”

Alex felt her gut tighten and she bit her lip, knowing that if she opened her mouth the first thing out of it would be a gasp.

“You’re an Oracle, Alex. And you’re not alone.”

Headlights.
The roar of engines.
roar of engines
SMASH!!
SMASH!!

Without warning, the Porsche suddenly bounded forward, Tana speeding through the traffic wherever he could find a hole. Alex was pinned to her seat as he floored it, but Cole sat back lazily, unfazed as a motorbike pulled up alongside them.

“What is this guy’s deal?” shouted Alex over the deafening din of competing engines.

But the words were only just out of her mouth when she caught movement. Behind them, the other two riders had found them too, manoeuvring and hemming them in.

“Alex Wintour!” shouted Cole over the noise. “Meet the Temple!”

“The *what*?”

“Well, remember when I said that you weren’t the only one? That wasn’t necessarily all *good* news.”

One of the riders, keeping pace right alongside them, was so close that Alex could see herself reflected dumbly in the black curve of his visor. Drawing something out of his belt, he swung it at the window, which imploded around her, engulfing the inside of the car in a vortex of tiny shards.

The club comes through the
shattered gap
and—

She caught a bright blue buzz out of the corner of her eye as the charged end of a club was thrust at her. With a blind grasp and a yank, she pulled it from the rider’s hand, jabbing it back at his outstretched arm. The rider’s body jerked violently, sending him and his bike careering into

the oncoming lane, which swept him away in a raucous tangle.

“HAHA!” whooped Cole. “Nice work, Alex! You’re going to fit right in!”

“What the hell do they want?” yelled Alex over the roar of another rider pulling up alongside.

“That’s a tricky one to answer,” said Cole. “With the Temple, it might not be something you’ve even done yet.”

Alex blinked, sure that she’d misheard him.

“But if I had to guess,” he mused, “I’d say it has something to do with the little gismo in your handbag.”

“It’s not a han— Wait, how do they know what I have in my bag? How do *you*?”

“Because I’m the person you’re stealing it for,” Cole said with a grin. “Left here, Tana. Take Tower Bridge.”

A volley of questions withered in Alex’s throat as Tana braked hard and the seat belt cut sharply into her collarbone. He’d taken the corner at the last second, but still the two remaining bikes kept up, buzzing round them like flies.

The enormity of Tower Bridge took shape in the windscreen and Alex instinctively braced herself. She couldn’t help but notice that the gate on one side was already closing, meaning the bridge was about to be raised.

But Tana wasn’t slowing down. He was speeding up.

On either side of them, stationary traffic flashed by, the compact form of the Porsche finding gaps where there should have been none. Cole, however, seemed worryingly unconcerned.

“Let’s go somewhere quieter and we can talk without these idiots interrupting us every five seconds, shall we?”

he said, apparently oblivious to the catastrophe speeding towards them. "I live just on the other side of the river. Have you had breakfast?"

But Alex wasn't listening. All she could hear was the warning bell of the closing gate. The second side was beginning to swing shut now, closing the road, yet Tana pushed on, making straight for it. She sensed the riders on either side drop back fractionally as they realised what the Porsche was attempting, but all three vehicles screamed on to the base of the bridge together, hurtling through the smattering of cars and buses, and heading for the swinging rail.

One of the bridge's forbidding Gothic towers loomed over them as they raced towards the arch at its base. Beyond it, Alex could see the gleaming hull of a massive cruiser sitting heavily on the Thames, waiting for the bridge to lift.

"Tana, what are you doing?" she screamed, her knuckles whitening as she gripped the upholstery for dear life. But Tana remained silent and sped up.

They were the first to reach the gates. Brakes squealing, the Porsche shimmied through the gap just as it was about to clang shut. But the car juddered, lurching sideways as the wrought iron slammed into the rear.

"Aw, that's not gonna buff out!" wailed Cole as Tana corrected course. They were through, but the impact had bought just enough time for one of the riders to slip in with them before the gates hammered home. Behind her, Alex heard a resounding *clank* against the unyielding metal. The last rider apparently hadn't been so lucky.

They howled to a shuddering stop, smoke billowing

all around them. The passing shriek of an engine and a whipped swirl of vapour told them they weren't alone and, as it cleared, they found the last remaining rider idling between them and the yawning split at the bridge's centre. Neither vehicle moved.

"Cole, if you're trying to impress me, death by bridge is not the way to do it."

"Relax, Alex," he replied nonchalantly. "Where's the risk when you already know the outcome?"

Slowly at first, but steadily gaining speed, the road rose upward, taking them with it.

Are these guys completely insane? Alex thought. But then suddenly the obvious truth hit her.

"Wait, you're an ... Oracle too?"

Cole didn't reply but his bright eyes glinted in the rear-view as they met hers.

In seconds, they were at a forty-five-degree angle and climbing, yet the rider refused to budge, the blank visor radiating grim determination.

"Did you know this bridge is a hundred and thirty years old?" Cole said in a blithe, conversational tone. "Can you believe that? I mean, the engineering alone!"

"Cole, what the hell are you talking abo—?"

"*Now*," he said simply, and Tana floored it, the car accelerating with breathtaking speed, eating up the incline.

The rider took off an instant later, hurtling towards them, as if the two vehicles were engaged in a medieval joust. Alex noticed with alarm that as the rider got closer the bike's wheels were leaving the tarmac. The bridge had lifted to the point where the rider was no longer driving, he was *falling*, and as he sailed helplessly by them—

Everything froze.

Alex found herself at the centre of some kind of bubble. The world had turned a muddy black and white that rippled with a dull shimmer, as if she were trapped underwater in a pocket of air. She only had a moment to register this latest impossibility when the window beside her imploded, sending her shredded nerves jangling and launching an involuntary shriek out of her mouth. A rider's gloved hand reached in, grabbing the backpack off the seat beside her, and was gone before she could react.

Time crashed back in, rushing to fill the void as if nothing had happened, except now the car had two broken windows and Alex's bag was gone.

"What the *hell!*" she bellowed, but neither Tana nor Cole seemed to be aware of what had just happened.

Alex had a fleeting concern for the contents of the bag. How was she going to explain their absence to Roz? Then the engine screamed, the car lurched and Alex's stomach dropped as if she'd missed a step on the stairs. She remembered where she was, and that she had the very real possibility of death by bridge to worry about, and her bag and its contents slipped down her list of priorities. The seat belt pressed against her, struggling to hold her in place as she was lifted off the seat and she realised they were airborne.

Beneath them, all the wheels were running on was the cruiser's vented fumes.

"Oh ... my ... *GAAAAAAAAAGGGGHHHHHDD!!!!*"

Through the windscreen, the upper windows of the Tower tilted into view from below, windows blushing pink in the morning light. The road beneath followed

impossibly, growing closer. Fast.

!!ssslaamm!!

Alex pounded back into her seat as the car hit tarmac, every rivet in the machine howling in protest. Brakes bawling, they rocketed down the still-rising bridge, the level section rushing forward to meet them at a heart-stopping rate. Bounced around like crash-test dummies, they hit it with a metallic crunch and a storm of sparks, airbags exploding in their faces and pinning them bodily to their seats.

In the stunned silence that followed, Alex's airbag sighed and deflated. Cole's and Tana's bags already sat limply in their laps and Alex caught the flash of a curved, bone-handled knife in Tana's hand.

Somehow the engine was still running and he pulled the battered Porsche to a groaning stop before the firmly shut gates, where crowds of early morning commuters sat open-mouthed, gaping at the sight.

Alex knew exactly how they felt.

"So," Cole enquired cheerily, turning in his seat to face her, "how do you like your eggs?"

Alex opened her mouth to answer and vomited loudly out of the broken window.