

The lights change from green to amber. Nadeeka hesitates for a heartbeat before pressing her foot flat against the accelerator. It's a pedestrian crossing but the pavement is empty, and ordinarily she would mutter to herself about people who press the button, then don't wait for the green man, but she doesn't have the time, doesn't have the headspace to think about anything other than where she's going and what she will find when she gets there.

Ahead of her, a car edges through the lights at the precise second they switch to red, and now it's too late for her to stop even if she wanted to. She grips the steering wheel as though it's a life ring and she's drowning, then she flies through the crossing, ten miles over the speed limit.

Three seconds later, there's a burst of siren, a flash of blue in her rearview mirror.

"No, no, no, no!" Nadeeka is horrified by the prospect of being pulled over but more so by the delay this will cause. She has to get home. It's been a whole hour since she spoke to Jamie, fifteen minutes since she finally put her finger on what had been wrong with their conversation, ten since she grabbed her car keys and left the office. Anything could have happened in that time.

The police car overtakes her, and for a moment, she entertains the idea that it has simply been trying to pass her, but then it slows down, forcing her to slow too, and she gives in to the inevitable and pulls over.

"Do you know why we've stopped you?" The policeman is tall and broad, his upper body filling her open window as he rests one forearm on the roof of her car. His breath mists in the cold December air. Nadeeka doesn't want to feel intimidated, but she finds herself leaning to the left, making space in front of his too-close face. Even though the policeman is in uniform— even though an actual police car is in front of her, even though his female colleague is standing next to it— Nadeeka has read too many news articles to trust what she sees.

"Could I see some ID, please?" She feels foolish asking. Rude even. But that's what kills women, isn't it? Politeness.

The policeman gives an amused smile, but he pulls a lanyard out from beneath his ballistic vest and dangles the laminated card in front of her. She reads his name— Police Constable Dan Harrington— and nods, although she has no idea what a real police ID card looks like. Nadeeka has been lucky; in almost forty years, she has never needed the police.

PC Harrington tucks away his badge. "Well, do you?"

It takes Nadeeka a moment to remember the question, another moment to decide what to say. Maybe PC Harrington saw her speeding but didn't see her run a red light. Is one offense worse than the other? She shakes her head mutely.

"You were doing forty in a thirty."

"Was I? I'm so sorry." Nadeeka glances at the clock, imagines what's happening right now at home. Her hands twitch on the steering wheel.

"And you drove through a pedestrian crossing when the light was red."

*Fuck, fuck, fuck.*

"In a hurry, are you?"

"Yes," Nadeeka says. "But that's no excuse. I realize that." She knows instinctively that she's expected to be meek. Partly because she is in the wrong but also because she is a woman and he is a man, and because her skin is brown and his is white.

"What's your name?"

"Nadeeka Prasanna."

In front of the car, the female police officer is reciting Nadeeka's license plate into her radio, frowning in a way that makes Nadeeka nervous.

"Address?"

She gives it to him, complete with her postcode.

"And the car's registered there?"

She nods. A trickle of sweat makes its way down her spine. This is absurd. Nadeeka owns her car outright, it's licensed and roadworthy, and there's no contraband in the boot, yet she feels as though she's been caught with stolen goods. PC Harrington is waiting— for someone on the other end of the radio to confirm her address, Nadeeka assumes— and when he eventually gives a curt nod, she lets out her relief in a long breath.

"Where were you off to in such a rush, then?"

Nadeeka notes the past tense and feels a clutch of fear that she might not be allowed to continue on her way. "To my house," she says. "I— " And then her voice breaks, tears springing to her eyes.

“Are you okay?” It’s the first time the female officer has spoken. She comes toward the car window, and PC Harrington moves to one side, so now they are both looking in at her, an exhibit in a car-shaped cage.

“Not really. My partner— ” Nadeeka breaks off again, unable to finish. “Is there a problem at home?” the female officer says, and Nadeeka knows what sort of problem she means, so she shakes her head. Jamie isn’t like that, thank God.

“I’m probably just overthinking it,” Nadeeka says, “because of what’s happened in the past. But I needed to see it for myself, to prove that— ”

“See *what* for yourself?” PC Harrington has less patience than his female colleague.

Nadeeka bites the inside of her cheek. Beneath her cream blouse and navy blazer, her armpits are clammy.

“Alternatively,” PC Harrington says, “we can just write you a ticket and— ”

“See that my partner isn’t cheating on me.” It comes out in a rush, the first time she’s acknowledged it head on.

There’s a pause.

“Do you think he is?” The policewoman sounds genuinely interested. Close up, she doesn’t look as intimidating, her downturned mouth the result of genetics or age rather than grumpiness.

Tears spill over Nadeeka’s lower lashes. “I don’t know.”

Her heart aches. She’s been here before, and she knows it has made her untrusting. Jamie has the patience of a saint to put up with her questions and suspicions. “I’m not your ex-husband,” he’d said gently when he had found her looking through the jacket he’d left hanging in the hall. “I would never, ever cheat on you.” He had turned out his own pockets for her then, in spite of her protestations, and insisted she have the passcode for his phone. “I’ve got nothing to hide,” he had said. “You can look any time you want.”

Jamie’s expression had been open, and Nadeeka had detected no resentment in his voice. She’d found it impossible not to draw comparisons with Scott, who had once punched a hole through the wall when he’d found her looking at his phone. “I was just looking up the menu for the Chinese takeaway,” Nadeeka had tried to explain. “My phone’s upstairs.” Scott hadn’t listened, and the hole had stayed until earlier this year, when Jamie had quietly filled it in and repainted the wall.

“My daughters’ dad was seeing other women the whole time we were married,” Nadeeka tells the police officers now. “He listed all his affairs when he walked out, because apparently, hurting me once wasn’t enough.”

“What a shit,” the policewoman says. “I had one of those once. He got T-boned by a ten-ton truck, and it couldn’t have happened to a nicer guy, to be honest.” Her blond hair is escaping the confines of its scrunchie. “Your bloke, though: I’m sure it’s not what you think. Has he ever given you any reason to suspect he’s seeing someone else?”

PC Harrington looks pointedly at his watch.

Nadeeka shakes her head and then shrugs helplessly. She’s come to realize her instincts aren’t reliable. “I called Jamie from work this morning,” she explains. “I heard a woman’s voice and him telling her he’d just be a minute, then he told me it was the HR director who had popped into his office.”

“Maybe it was,” the policewoman says. “It sounds to me as though you’re carrying a lot of emotional baggage from your previous relationship that might be coloring how you’re viewing this one.”

“Are we therapists now?” PC Harrington says under his breath. He takes a small pad of printed tickets from a pocket on the side of his trousers and flips to a new page. He has slim fingers with neatly filed nails.

“But when I put down the phone,” Nadeeka says, because now she can’t stop, “I couldn’t shake the feeling that something was wrong. Then it hit me.”

“What?” The policewoman’s eyes are round.

PC Harrington balances his pad on Nadeeka’s open window and begins filling out a form with small, careful block capitals.

“I heard a train in the background.” Nadeeka replays it now in her head: the distinctive rumble that had seemed to be such a huge compromise when she and Scott had bought the house but that now was simply background noise. “But Jamie’s office isn’t anywhere near the train line,” she explains. “Our house is. The train runs right past the end of the garden. Jamie was at home when I spoke to him. I’m sure of it.”

The policewoman’s mouth drops open in vicarious outrage. “The bastard!” She turns to PC Harrington. “Put that away.”

“She ran a red light.”

“So would I if my scumbag boyfriend lied to me.” She snatches the booklet from her colleague’s grasp and nods to Nadeeka. “Go on, love. Give him what for.”

Nadeeka doesn’t want to give Jamie what for. She wants to be wrong. She wants to get home to an empty house. She wants to discover that the train line in the town she’s lived in for twenty years does in fact pass close enough to Jamie’s office for her to have heard it.

She sticks to the speed limit and doesn’t run any more red lights, and precisely forty-five minutes after leaving work, she pulls into the cul-de-sac where she and Jamie and her daughters live.

She frowns. There’s a police car outside her house.

Nadeeka and Scott had been renting when Maya was born, but by the time Nish came along, they had bought 10 Cedar Walk, a three-bedroom semi with space in the garden for a trampoline and a veg patch. Technically, Scott still owns half. The financial agreement thrashed out in the divorce stipulates that the house can’t be sold until both children are in secondary school, which gives Nadeeka another five years to save enough to buy Scott out. The money Jamie gives her each month to cover his share of the bills goes straight into what Nadeeka calls her “freedom fund.” She parks behind the police car. Bloody PC Harrington. Presumably he overruled his female colleague—because how dare a police officer show some compassion toward a woman in distress?—and broke some speed limits of his own to get here before her. Fine. Let him give her a bloody ticket for running a red light. She’s got more important things to worry about.

But the uniformed officer standing by the car isn’t PC Harrington, and now she sees there is blue-and-white tape across her open front door, and her feet slow of their own accord, as though they already know what’s behind it. Blood thrums in her ears, her pulse loud and insistent, and as the police officer is telling her she can’t go inside, Nadeeka shakes her head to clear the confusion. This is her house. Of course she can go inside. She lives here.

“You live here?” The officer blinks rapidly. He’s young, Nadeeka realizes, barely into his twenties, with peach-fuzz cheeks and the remnants of teenage acne. She realizes too that he doesn’t know how to deal with this turn of events, which suggests that whatever has brought the police to her door is very bad indeed.

She rips at the tape.

“Wait! You can’t— ”

But Nadeeka is already in the little hall where her daughters' coats will hang when their father drops them home and where Jamie's coat is now, and even in the grip of her panic, she feels the bittersweet stab of vindication. She was right. Jamie hadn't been at work when she phoned. But she can't process what this means, because there's a man in a suit standing in the doorway to the lounge, and beyond him...beyond him is—

“Oh my God.” Her voice cracks.

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