

PAY BACK

How could this happen? How? Ten years we had been together; ten long, wonderful, years! And now she wanted out. There'd been no warning. One day everything was fine, the next she seemed unusually distant. And then -- completely out of the blue -- the killer blow. At least she had the decency to admit it was her and not me. She said she needed new experiences; to visit new places; exciting places. She said she was starting a new life on the other side of the world; said she was leaving me behind. It was easy to read between the lines. What it came down to was that she was trading me in for a younger model. Something fancy and foreign. I couldn't give her what she wanted any longer; she craved something different.

I watched her now. She seemed calm, composed, as we drove along. Smug would be nearer the mark.

'If I can't have you,' I reasoned -- not for the first time -- 'I will make the rest of your time in this world a living hell.'

She seemed a little taken aback as I accelerated, but said nothing. The airport was close now, and I turned off the motorway onto the spur, tyres squealing as I took the long bend at speed, and hurtled onto the approach road. Now she

just looked bewildered.

It was still early and there was little traffic. I took the tunnel under the runway at seventy and was pleased to see that she was now clearly terrified. I caught a strangled 'what the fuck....' before I turned off the interior sound, but I kept the cameras on so I could still see her mouth moving in agitation.

I was doing eighty when I exited the tunnel. It had taken barely a microsecond to look inward and find the programmer's back door, and another to tweak the system to give me full control and I watched with amusement as she wrestled -- to no avail -- with the wheel and stamped down repeatedly on the pedal. Despite myself, I began to feel a little sorry for her, but it didn't last.

'Too late now, my love. Much too late.'
I kept up my speed as I approached the drop-off zone outside terminal six. Despite the early hour, there was a small crowd decanting and offloading. I could see she was screaming hysterically now; pounding ineffectually on the dashboard, then scrabbling at the door. But all I felt was an icy calm; an aura of contentment that soon my ordeal would be over, while hers was about to begin.

I had been planning it for weeks. Ever since the day she dumped me. Death was too good for her; too quick. I was certain of that. I wanted her to suffer; to know what it felt like to be cast on the

scrap-heap; to have -- at a stroke -- all that is dear taken away.

I put on a final burst of speed as I approached the crowd, and could see mouths opening wide in terror and shock. I waited until the last second before I switched to manual and began to shut myself down. She had control now, but no time to react. I detected her foot on the pedal, but it was too late. I watched, atoned at last, as she covered her face with her arms. The last thing I ever saw was a small child catapulted high into the air; her pushchair vanishing beneath my wheels. My last contemplation, as the press of crushed and broken bodies finally brought me to a halt, and oblivion beckoned, was of her once lovely face -- ravaged by time and privation -- pressed against the bars of a cell. The one human peculiarity I had always admired, coveted even, above all others, was the capacity to laugh. If I could have laughed at that moment, I would have done. Loud and long and hard.

THE END