

Extinction Event

John Day

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SHIT HAPPENED.

It was early morning in Caserta, just north of Naples. The air was fresh and still, the sun already warming the air cast a green light through the tall trees around the clearing.

Just out of sight in a small side road, tension was mounting; the exchange of drugs and €2,000,000 was under way.

Tim Jones, a tall 28 year old thug, cocked his Beretta PM12S machine pistol before leaving his car and glided silently out from behind the drug buyer's van. Unobserved he circled behind the group of six young men, three of his and three of the buyer's. He opened fire, scything through the six of them with the full 20 round magazine of 9mm bullets.

Snapping out the used clip and fitting a full one, he studied the crumpled bodies.

No one moved.

Without glancing up, he raised his free hand and beckoned to the red Fiat approaching him, 100 meters away. Carla, a pretty 26 year old blond, floored the accelerator. The highly tuned car darted towards Tim, tires squealing and smoking as they clawed the tarmac. Seconds later, it skidded to a halt at Tim's feet. Carla opened the driver's door and released the trunk lid. Tim tossed in the canvas bags of cash and heroin and slammed the lid shut.

As he ran to the open driver's door, Carla slid over into the passenger seat. A shot rang out; a bullet starred the windscreen and penetrated just below the top of the steering wheel rim.

"Ahh!" she screamed. "Look out Tim, he nearly got me."

Had she moved a second later, the bullet would have smashed into the base of her throat, but it passed out through the door opening, as Tim leapt into it. He was gut shot.

The sledgehammer impact of the bullet was not enough to overcome Tim's onward rush to get in the car. He gave a brief gasping moan, doubled up and fell in. Carla pulled him in and eased him upright in the seat. She was

stunned and speechless at the sight of the blood oozing from between his fingers as he clasped the wound, then she suddenly realized what had happened.

Another two shots rang out; both hitting the bodywork.

Tim let out a cry of rage. "You fuckin' well stay dead when I kill you!" He grabbed the steering wheel with one hand and gear lever in the other, he revved hard, dropped the clutch and the car scabbled its way over the damp forest floor towards the gunman.

Mortally wounded, one of the six men had recovered enough to take revenge for the double cross and fired at the driver's position, in the hope of a kill.

The accelerating car hit the bodies with a violent lurch; the tires frantically clawed and tore at clothing and flesh. Tim enjoyed the bumping, slithering crunching sound as the car rode up and over the corpses.

The gunman had tried to get up, out of the car's path, but it hit him full in the face, throwing him backward and under it. Carla braced herself until the ride smoothed out and looked tensely at Tim. How long could he keep control of the speeding car and how could she help him?

Tim's face was fixed in a wild grimace; staring ahead, he was unaware of anything except escape. He had lost all reason and was now on a road leading to town, instead of into the mountains as planned.

A hidden police car waiting for early morning speeders lurched into motion. Tim's Fiat took a tight right hand bend, tires squealing in a barely controlled four-wheeled drift, in front of it.

Carla had just noticed the police car and shouted a warning to Tim, which fell on deaf ears. He was starting to go into shock now and was losing consciousness. The Fiat swerved from one side of the road to the other. In Tim's hands, a crash was only seconds away and arrest would certainly follow.

She grabbed the steering wheel and regained directional control. However, the car continued to accelerate as Tim slumped against the door in a faint, his foot hard on the accelerator. Carla reached for the ignition switch on the side of the steering column and turned it off. Thankfully, the Fiat immediately lost speed.

Steering with one hand, she reached across and opened the driver's door slightly. The slipstream tearing past the door prevented it from opening more than a few inches. Carla knew she had to push Tim out somehow. It had to be when the car was taking a sharp bend so the centrifugal force would help throw him out.

Regulating the road speed by switching the ignition on and off and steering with the other hand, Carla could only wait for the right moment. The police car was gaining ground rapidly, so time was running out fast!

A large roundabout at the edge of town came into view; it was just what she needed. To take the roundabout in the wrong direction, Carla drifted across into the oncoming lane. Tim slid hard over to the door, pushing it open. With all her strength she shoved him out.

He fell out slowly, pinched between the door and door pillar, eventually dragging the road with his face and chest. Somehow, one of his feet or his jeans had caught at the base of the seat, pulling him along the road.

Tim was not quite dead when he hit the road, so the agony of skin and bone being scraped off on the tarmac registered somewhere in his brain for a second or two. The snagged foot suddenly pulled free, when Tim's outstretched arms were pinned to the road by the back wheel. He was yanked out and dragged under the car. Carla was almost thrown out herself as the rear wheel bucked over the corpse. Seconds later, she slid behind the steering wheel and managed to regain full control of the Fiat.

The police car was now alongside Carla, on the inside of the roundabout forcing her onto the verge. Dabbing the brakes, she dropped behind the police and skidded outwards to the curb. The police assumed Carla was taking the approaching exit off the roundabout as the Fiat was drifting that way, so they took it ahead of her. She continued on to the next exit.

The police driver was quick to realize his mistake and with considerable skill, he spun his car around to follow Carla. His misjudgment was all she needed to escape. She had the edge, with a nippy car and her will to survive at all costs.

Roadblocks were being set up of course, but Carla was always well prepared. She believed that if you fail to plan, you plan to fail!

She headed away from town back the way Tim had come and reached the turn off to the emergency escape route, which was the direction Tim should

have taken. With the police car in close pursuit, she calmly negotiated the narrow road cut into the rocky hillside, up towards the forest. The powerful police car was gaining on her and now getting too close for comfort.

Her heart sank as the engine cut out briefly then picked up again. Low on fuel she guessed and the gauge confirmed it. The fuel pipe or the tank must be leaking, probably damaged when Tim had driven over the bodies. The long steady climb with few bends to swill the meager contents past the pickup pipe had caused the glitch. Zig-zagging the car sloshed fuel around the tank, maintaining a flow to the engine. The police car was now only 20 meters behind and gaining fast.

“You’re too close,” muttered Carla to herself as she snatched up a radio controller, attached to the dashboard with Velcro. She switched it on as she passed under a rocky outcrop and pressed a button, triggering a nitroglycerine charge embedded in the rock. The force blasted her car sideways, but she quickly regained control and accelerated away. The blast caught the police car full on, smashing one side into the stone parapet and grinding it away in a shower of sparks. The other side was blasted with fist-sized chunks of rock; the police car stalled.

A large landslide fell onto the road right behind them, blocking it completely. Totally stunned by the attack, it took several moments for the driver to recover and restart the engine. He floored the accelerator and with the engine screaming, dropped the clutch. Bucking and screeching against the parapet, the police car broke free and was in hot pursuit again.

Carla grinned cheekily as she glanced in her rear view mirror, at the havoc she had caused.

“Bang goes your no claim bonus cop,” she muttered.

Still gripping the controller, she rounded a bend and pressed it again. Another explosion and more rock spread over the road in a landslide; she was almost home free.

Carla’s engine spluttered and died; she wiggled the steering frantically and brought it back to life.

“Just a few hundred meters more. Please! Please!” She begged. “Don’t let me down now, please!”

The car surged forward and she backed right off the accelerator, maximizing every precious drop of fuel left in the tank.

A narrow track suddenly came into view on the left and she spun the wheel, drove up it a few meters and stopped. Just ahead was a particularly dirty, dark green 4X4 vehicle, substantially hidden by the undergrowth.

At a glance, she could see no one was in it or nearby.

Leaping out of the Fiat she snatched a set of keys from the glove compartment and raced to the dark green Cherokee, beeping it unlocked as she ran. Before opening the door, she glanced at the dashboard to see if any warning lights were flashing. No lights glowed, so she got in and started the engine. Thankfully, it roared into life.

Dragging the bags of cash and drugs from the Fiat to the Cherokee, she tossed them onto the rear seat and slammed the door shut. She dashed back to the Fiat, flicked a switch under the dashboard and a loud buzzer sounded. Inside the Cherokee once more, Carla drove off into the woods.

A loud thump and a glimpse of flames through the trees confirmed to her that the Fiat had commenced the destruction process. No fingerprints or forensic evidence would remain on the car; it had done well and was expendable. The car would burn for some time, blocking the track to any vehicles approaching from the road, also part of the plan.

The route through the woods was well organized. It provided a link to a motorway network (SS7, E45 and A1 merge) offering many possible busy routes out of the area. The dense tree cover and dull green paintwork also made spotting the Cherokee difficult from the air.

The track soon petered out but Carla managed to find her way by carefully following the faint tire marks left days before, when the route was worked out. Ten minutes later, she emerged onto a side road in sight of the first of a series of roundabouts.

Carla pulled into a large, busy petrol station and drove under the canopy near the car wash. There were two cars ahead of her in the queue and as she sat there, waiting her turn she looked at herself. She had blood on her hands and face and it was all over her clothes. Hopefully no one would come close enough to see through the tinted glass.

Five minutes later and it was her turn to go through the wash. Tokens were already in the vehicle; all she had to do was wind down the window and put them in the carwash machine.

The transformed Cherokee emerged with gleaming chrome and paintwork. No one would associate the quietly burbling vehicle going in with the one growling out.

On the motorway, Carla noted many police vehicles heading back the way she had come and several helicopters watching traffic flow near junctions.

By road, there was no quick route to this section of motorway from where Carla left the Fiat, so roadblocks were not set up on this stretch. Because of the dense undergrowth and rough terrain, the pursuing police did not consider the cross-country route was feasible. You could spend a day finding a way through.

Carla pressed on, keeping pace with the mass of vehicles around her and remained unnoticed.

Five miles later, she turned onto a side road and eventually, into a disused barn, pulling up by an aging silver Honda Prelude.

There were no doors on the barn, but she felt safe in its dark shadows. She got out of the Cherokee and dragged the moneybags out of the back, onto the ground. Popping the boot of the Prelude, she pulled out a large plastic sheet and a hold-all. She spread out the sheet on the floor and stripped off all her clothes, piling everything in the middle. Taking a long drink from some bottled water, she used the rest to wash off the blood, which took some removing and there was not much water to spare.

Fresh clothes made Carla feel better. The denim jacket and jeans, white blouse and peaked cap complimented her ponytail. The Versace shades completed the picture of a cute little twenty-six-year-old blond, on her way home to her folks.

The sound of a helicopter caught her attention. She peeked out but it must have been above the clouds somewhere and she reckoned it would soon be in sight.

She knew the Cherokee had a tracking device fitted so the helicopter, belonging to Marco the drug-dealing boss who had planned the escape

route, was expected. He suspected Tim had double-crossed him and wanted to get his investment back.

“Time to go,” she said to herself, leaping into action.

The cash and everything on the sheet were crammed into the trunk of the Honda. As she drove out, she pressed the Cherokee central locking button on the key ring twice and threw the keys through its open window, onto the driver’s seat. The sleek silver car glided onto the road leading back to the motorway, without raising much dust.

A minute later, looking up through the sunroof, she saw a black helicopter starting its descent through the clouds towards the barn. It hovered a few feet from the ground, blowing dust everywhere. Two men with guns dropped to the ground and ran into the barn.

“It’s here,” reported the leading man over his radio. “The bags are in it as well.”

“Check them and get the money over here,” a voice crackled back from the helicopter.

“OK! They are full,” replied the leading man, a few seconds later. The man in the helicopter also heard a long beep tone picked up from the leading man’s microphone, and his scream.

“SHIT! The trembler has activated!”

The Cherokee exploded in the barn in a blinding flash, shooting flame and flying debris high into the air.

The helicopter immediately climbed and disappeared back into the cloud.

The plume of flame and smoke caught Carla’s eye and she smirked, “Oh! Naughty Carla” she scolded herself, “You must have reset the booby trap when you pressed the key ring twice ---”

She felt safe now. The long journey to her hideaway home would soon pass and she could begin to set up her investments using the drug money.

MAX IMAGINES THE WORST.

Max Fortune had been driving for three hours now, in the region of Lago Matese along the SP331. The quiet purr of the camper's engine and the never-ending 20-meter strip of road illuminated by the headlamps, made him drowsy. No other traffic had passed him during this time, typical for this time of the night in this part of Italy.

Throughout the journey, he relived in his mind the events which had brought him here. His wife had died in his arms twelve years earlier and he had struggled to bring up his son, while running a successful business, in England. He had had enough of that. His son James had passed through university with honors with a chemistry degree, but then James switched to a more exciting and rewarding career, in the computer industry. Why should he, Max Fortune, waste his remaining years? He wanted adventure!

There had been many women in Max's life, but none could see a future with him. He was fully committed to his work. The truth was, he had not found his soul mate; at forty-five and set in his ways, he did not think there was any chance now. Impulsively, he shut down his business, bought a camper van and set off to start afresh. So far, life had run pretty true to form. During these first three weeks of the grand adventure, on a scale of 1 to 10, thrill and excitement was somewhere about zero.

Max started the long winding ascent into the mountains. The hairpin bends on the way up at least broke the monotony. He shifted into second gear, then into first to negotiate the hairpin bend. In the inky blackness of the night he glimpsed the lights of another vehicle below. He was not sure whether he was pleased to see the manifestation of other human life on this road. He suspected bandits were in the area. He looked again; the lights were closer now and approaching fast!

The more he thought about the situation, the worse it seemed to be. He was being irrational and feeding his fears.

In desperation, he looked for somewhere off the road to hide out until the car passed. The left side of the road was almost a sheer drop into oblivion and the right hand side was a sheer cliff face to the stars.

He pressed harder on the accelerator; the drumming of the now high revving engine, as it strained to push the heavy van slowly up the mountain road, made him panic. He had to get ahead, he must hide - anything but let them catch up and murder him.

“Pull yourself together,” he spluttered to himself “you’re just psyching yourself up” but his foot pressed the pedal even harder to the floor.

Frantically he peered from side to side looking for some sort of refuge, whilst down below he could see the approaching lights.

“Christ, they’re gaining on me! What on earth can I do? Why did I come to this god-forsaken place?”

Relentlessly, the lights grew closer. Max felt sick in his stomach; he had convinced himself that he was about to be robbed and killed by bandits.

“Damn it!” He shouted.

Logic had deserted him, he could not think straight. He had led a sheltered life, free from violence. News reports on television were the closest he had come to the reality of it all and now he was to become a victim. Probably no one would ever know he had been killed!

The lights of the following car flashed in his wing mirror. They were on the same upward straight as him. He checked his fuel gauge, the width of the road, the feasibility of blocking their path and preventing them overtaking.

The road was quite wide, except at the bends. He had fuel enough for the 100km journey to the nearest town, but he couldn’t possibly block murderous bandits for 100km.

Beeeeeeep - bbeeeeeeeep- beeeeeep. The black Mercedes shot past at least 50km/hour faster than Max was travelling – and it did not stop.

“You- crazy- bastards! I hope you kill yourselves,” he yelled.

Relief swept over him and he started to shake. He felt so stupid! Here was the great adventurer and at the sight of the first bogeyman after dark he was a quivering wreck.

From this moment on, Max’s life changed. He was about to enter Carla’s sinister world.

Carla invested the drug money she had stolen with the help of dearly departed Tim in Caserta. She had now been captured by the band of thugs

working for Marco, the drug baron. When cornered she claimed Tim had planned everything and forced her to help him. She had allegedly been on the run ever since, believing Marco was out to kill her.

Carla told the men she had secured the money and that, if they took her to Marco, she would tell him how to get it back. It was all lies of course; the sly minx had manipulated Tim into double crossing and then shooting his own men. Now she needed time to find a way out of this fine mess.

They were travelling in the black Mercedes, on the last part of the journey to Marco's home, as they passed the shit scared Max Fortune.

THE TUNNEL.

Carla laughed falsely at the light banter taking place in the black Mercedes. She sat in the back between Steve and Pepe.

Steve, from the Gorbals, in Scotland, was ordinary looking, about 30, with close-cropped light brown hair, masking his premature baldness. He was quick witted and his ability to handle himself well in a fight had got him a place on the team.

Tonight, he was wound up like a coiled spring; a Cobra ready to strike, and with good reason. He had recommended Carla and Tim make the drug deal near Caserta, but they had pulled a double-cross. If she did not come up with the missing money when they delivered her to Marco, he was history!

Pepe liked to think he was in charge. Older than the others, he thought he knew better than they did, but he was actually just useful muscle, very loyal to Marco and only there for the ride. Pepe was planning to retire soon, to spend all his time with his young wife and her 5-year-old son. Pepe's mind drifted back two weeks, to the last time he had seen his Mexican beauty. He thought of the few hours of passion they had enjoyed together before Philippe had issued his orders to find Carla. His eyes glazed over, and his penis stiffened---

The driver was a fat gutted Brazilian bastard, called Vincent; a brilliant driver and a sadistic killer with a large appetite, not just for killing.

Next to him was Philippe, the archetypical Columbian drug lord. Some claimed he was the Devil's spawn. He had handsome but cruel looks; olive skinned, with dark brown eyes and black hair worn in a ponytail. He was as cunning as a fox, a consummate chamer and utterly loyal to Marco, his

boss. Consequently, he was Marco's second in command, although fully intending to take over from Marco, very soon.

Carla Day had transformed her appearance and adopted the persona of a cute, but rough little tart of twenty-six. Her slightly husky voice made her appear mouthy and hinted that she probably took drugs. Her shoulder length blond hair was a bit of a mess and as wild as she was.

What she could not disguise was her quick-wits, her angelic face and sapphire blue eyes. With care and grooming she would be stunningly attractive. Again, her appearance gave no hint to the inner workings of this complex and talented girl.

Carla pondered a while over the events that had led her here. She was scared witless, knowing that at the end of the ride there would be a bullet in her pretty head. Ripping off Marco had been a big mistake but after all, it was not her fault Philippe's goons had blown up the drugs, in the Cherokee. Actually, though, it was!

She knew the risks and had previously gotten away with a similar scam, elsewhere in Italy. She had hoped to get away with it again – normally, crooks do not run to the police when they are ripped off.

Carla felt a little emptiness at the loss of Tim, the guy she worked with, who had been her lover for a while. Sex was always a perfect tool to manipulate men and she had needs, just like any other healthy woman. "What a waste," she thought "a good-looking hunk like that."

She shuddered when she relived in her mind, the grotesque way he had left this world, gut shot and dragged along the road. The feeling of dread swept over her, the sickness deep in her stomach and the loosening of her bowels. Very soon, she would be as dead as Tim!

Carla consciously refocused her thoughts and regained composure. Everyone was quiet now, each man preoccupied with personal thoughts.

Carla knew that she was up against four ruthless killers, who knew she was on her way to certain death, though no one had said as much. Those were Philippe's orders. He thought she would be more manageable and perhaps co-operate, if she could see a way of getting out alive. The others could see the logic in that too.

She quietly visualized a number of scenarios, all relying on the element of surprise.

However, even if she could kill all four armed men, how could she control the speeding car on this mountain road, from the back seat?

The road had a precipitous drop on one side and a rock face on the other. On one hand, at 60 to 80 km/hour, the car would ricochet off the rock face and plunge over the precipice, or on the other hand, just plunge. She smiled inwardly, as the answer came to her.

The men remained silent; Pepe had gone much further with his imagination and only his body was in the car. In his mind, Steve was running through his argument with Philippe, justifying his position and convincing himself that he could get away with it. Of course, the argument was all one sided and it took his full concentration.

Vincent, the driver was hoping he would get to execute Carla. He envied most other men; the likes of Steve, Philippe and most of all, dear departed Tim. They all had no trouble getting women; even old Pepe had a gorgeous wife. He was under the illusion that good looks were not particularly important to women, so why couldn't he get a beauty? He imagined that if he said to Carla "stick with me, I will spare you and we can make a life together," she would go for it. He fantasized about making love to her, she would be a willing lover because he held her life in his hands---and then he would kill her!

His arousal gradually reduced the car's speed by 20km/hour. Only Carla noticed.

Philippe was preparing himself for his meeting with Marco. He imagined that he, Marco and Carla would sit down together in a relaxed atmosphere. They would ask her the whereabouts of the €2,000,000 in cash that she and Tim had made off with.

They would give the impression that they believed Carla had been loyal, even though the exchange at Caserta was bungled, and that she was in hiding from the buyers. Carla could either hand over the money, or be a fool and die with her secret. Either way, they intended to murder her.

Philippe realized that Carla was outstanding in the wits department, she would bargain for her freedom, in exchange for the money. What would

she come up with now? He stared through the windscreen into the night with unseeing eyes.

Carla saw the blank faces and knew surprise was possible. She fidgeted and made herself more comfortable, fastening her seat belt. The men either side of her looked at her questioningly, but she looked back unconcerned and smiled faintly.

Blankness returned to the men's faces.

It had been about an hour since they passed the camper and it would be a further two hours before they reached Marco's home.

Staring fixedly ahead, Carla studied the road as the car swept around a left hand bend and into a right hand curve; the lights briefly revealed a tunnel in the distance. The car would enter the tunnel with the steering wheel turning slightly to the right.

They were 10 seconds away from the tunnel when Carla struck; with the speed of a striking mamba, she jabbed two fingers of her right hand into Steve's eyes, dragging her fingernails down his eyeballs. He screamed with pain, covering the gouged and bleeding orbs with his hands, his head and hands buried into his legs.

Instantly she swung to her right.

Pepe was drawing the gun from his shoulder holster with his right hand. He thumbed off the safety catch just as his hand started to clear the edge of his jacket, while pulling the slide back to cock the pistol with his left.

With her left hand between his chest and the gun, she clutched the gun and slipped her finger below his on the trigger. As she thrust herself between him and the seatback, so he could not hit her effectively with his free left arm, her right hand pressed against the side of the barrel pushing the muzzle into the center of his chest.

Pepe's right wrist was now bent nearly 90 degrees; he could not straighten it or properly control his fingers. Carla's bodyweight prevented him pulling his gun arm away.

She squeezed the trigger and the gun fired at point blank range. The bullet passed through his chest, just above the sternum and out behind his armpit.

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