

Raven ...

The cool summer night air pouring in through the open windows flipped and twisted the driver's hair as the black car sped down the open road. She picked up the can of Coke and sipped it, not taking her brown eyes off the road, keeping a lookout for the occasional deer or raccoon that might get a suicidal tendency as they often do at such a late hour as this. She glanced at her watch as she lifted her delicate wrist up to her line of sight and saw the luminescent hands indicating a little before 1:00 AM... "I'm going to be late if I don't hurry" she thought, slightly massaging the accelerator with her right foot and feeling the motor immediately pull the car ahead, anxious to gain the additional speed. "He better not have backed out.... " Never had she wanted a race as much as she wanted this one... and never had one meant so much. It all began a couple of weeks earlier, at the garage, when the rumble outside announced another car had pulled up....

The bells jangled on the door (with glass you could barely see through from all the hand smudges) as the lanky black man walked in. "Anyone here?" she heard him ask, her head still under the hood of her car, her arms aching from finishing up the spark plug change on the long, squatty sedan. "Whacha need?" she asked, raising her head and looking around the hood towards the front of the garage.

Her boss Vic, had just ran down to Swenson's to pick up some burgers and mushrooms for lunch so for now she was the only one there. Vic's garage was famous among the street race crowd. Many, many fast cars had been tweaked, modded, tweaked again, and sent back out to wreak havoc on the local strip and the occasional country road. Very few people knew that Diana was Vic's electronic/fuel injection specialist. For some strange reason, she could make sense of fuel maps, pulse widths, fuel pressure curves and all the other variables that very few people understood. And not only could she understand it, she could improve and improvise on it in such a way that additional power (untapped actually) could be gained. Plus, her chip burning talents for the late model fans was becoming legendary among Vic's customers. So, seeing the man in the droopy drawers and sideways turned hat she figured here comes another customer. But - she was wrong.

"You - are you the skirt with the black Buick everyone's talking about?" he asked, his face expressionless. "I might be" she said, recognizing the tone in his voice - a voice that was

strangely and uncomfortably familiar. "Why do you want to know - and who's askin'?"

"You ran a buddy of mine a couple of weeks ago, out on Ten Mile. You remember?" She had to think a minute. She hadn't ran on Ten Mile road for nearly a month, and she debated that maybe her last race was going to be that - her LAST street race. It was just getting too dangerous, as that race proved that night. Her opponent, driving a wild and outrageous LS6 Chevelle that had supposedly been dyno'd at over 780 rwhp had lost control near the finish, slid sideways narrowly missing Diana's GNX and then went off the road, wrapping itself around a telephone pole. Luckily, the driver's safety equipment did it's job, but the Chevelle was totaled. That's it! She remembered this guy from that night - he was with her opponent that night, talking trash about how the Chevelle was going to embarrass her. But his most obnoxious remarks were saved for her being a female and that her place was either at home or in his "crib".

She felt the hair on the back of her neck raise now and her face go flush. "Oh yeah, I remember all right. You're the one with the mouth. And your 'buddy' nearly got the both of us killed with his stupid antics near the finish. Yeah, I know who you are. What do you want?" she asked, her eyes now coldly staring straight into his sunglasses. "You" he sneered, "I want you. I wanna run you and your car. And I've got a proposition for you."

"Get out of here" she said, not smiling "get your ass out of here and don't come back. I'm not interested in running you for anything. It's clowns like you and your friend that give street racing a black eye - no pun intended. You're dangerous."

"Tell you what babe... Run me out on Ten Mile - just one time - and I won't bother you no mo'. Cause I'm gonna show you my taillights. And we aren't even racing for money."

"Then what would we be racing for? If you know anything about me, you know I don't run for less than a 5 bills and you ain't no exception." Her hands were on her hips now. "So if you don't have the cash, perhaps you should go flip some more burgers and come see me in about 5 years, ok?"

"I done tol' you, I ain't runnin' you for money. I'm running you for a date. I win, you go out with me Saturday night. You win - you're call. Now how could it be any better than that?"

You want \$500? I got it right here, right now.” He pulled a money clip out of his left front pocket that easily had that much and more in it. “Money? Or maybe something else?”

She thought for a minute.... She knew more about this guy than he realized. “So tell me about your car. Is it outside?” “Yep. Wanna see it?” She nodded, grabbed a red shop towel, and began rubbing her hands as she walked outside. Following him, she noticed an herbal scented cologne that almost made her gag. “Here it is - but you ain’t lookin’ under the hood. I will tell you this. It’s the motor out of Slicky’s SS - with a few of my ‘special’ tweaks.” She saw the tubbed back end of the late model Camaro first. “Slicks” she thought - and wide ones at that. She walked around the front end and saw the cat eye headlights. A LS1 Z/28 (well, it used to have an LS1 in it) front end greeted her. “God, that’s an ugly car” she said. “I never did like what they did to the front ends of the F-bodies in ’98. What year is it?” “It’s a 2000 with the heart of a big block ’70 Chevelle. Ain’t no replacement for displacement, sugar” he leered. “And I got the displacement.”

She thought for a moment.... “Ok, tell you what. If you win, I’ll go out with you. But only to a public place and there WON’T be any funny stuff. If I win, I’ll tell you what you gotta do that night. It won’t be illegal and it won’t be bad for you. But you ain’t gonna like it. That’s my deal. Take it or leave it.”

“Name the time” he said.

“1:00 AM, Friday night, on Ten Mile at the usual spot. You bring two witnesses; I’ll have a couple myself. That’s it. And what’s your name?” He flashed his perfect teeth “Just call me ‘tha dog’... that’ll do fine.”

“Ok. I’ll see you there Friday night. And ‘Dog’?” “Yeah?” “Don’t try to back down when you find out what you gotta do if I win, got it?” “Sugar - you ain’t gonna win, so I ain’t worryin’ none. But if you do, Dog pays his bets.” She just nodded as he slid into the cockpit around the cage and fired up the, for all practical purposes, full racecar. “I better get those plugs changed. And maybe burn a new chip for those new injectors sitting on the shelf”....

As she pulled up to the small group of cars she felt a chill. Dog’s Z was there, as was Vic and his younger brother James (who she definitely had eyes for!). But there was another

car there - another black Buick that she had heard about. A Buick from "the wrong side of the tracks"... a sick car. It had started life as a WE4 but the owner had taken it to some TR shop out east along with an unsigned check and said "Make it fast". She was sure that she was looking at possibly one of the few 9-second street driven Turbo Buicks in the country. She had barely got into the low 10's herself. She was sure she had the Z covered but here was most likely the most evil V6 in the state. Dog's witnesses stepped out of the nearly invisible in the night TR and watched her pull up, stop and open the trunk to get some tools and gloves.

She didn't say anything as she uncapped the dump tube, dropped the air pressure in the M&H's she had mounted on the Weld's and reached inside to pop the hood. The cool air felt good on her face as lifted the hood. Two turns on the FP regulator put her where she wanted to be. "I'll be ready in five minutes" she said. "No problem, sweet thang... no problem at all." She then went around, disconnected the orange wire to the computer, opened the passenger door and swapped chips. She already had a half tank of race gas in as well as a new O2 sensor. After she buttoned everything back up, she just nodded. "I'm ready".

Vic walked up. "Did you tell him what the deal is?" "Not yet. I will once I beat him." Dog just laughed. "Let's go."

They both got in their cars and turned the keys. She could hear the fuel pump begin to build pressure but before it finished Dog fired the Chevy. What sounded like rapid-fire cannon shots completely covered the sound of her lighting off the Stage 2 V6. She could barely hear the huge turbo whine as Dog revved his motor. She pulled up into the makeshift burnout box that Vic had watered for the two cars. She hit the line lock and heated the hides till white smoke rolled out from beneath her wheel wells. But even with her windows up and the helmet on, Dog's huge V8 pounded her ears. She began to worry... about maybe even losing to the thumper and having to be seen in public with someone she absolutely detested because of his "player" reputation. A shudder ran down her spine at that thought....

Both drivers released their line-locks almost simultaneously and smoked their way past the starting line in John Force style. Diana could drive and everyone there knew it. Her GNX had yet to lose since she put the Stage 2 motor in it, storing the original under wraps back in Vic's garage. The new Level 10 tranny was built to take the massive torque the Six would twist

and the beefed up 12 bolt posi was another bolt in to take the high horsepower the Buick developed. Of course, other suspension mods were done to ensure the beast would hook - and hook it did.

They both backed to the line and then rolled back up; watching James' upraised hands holding the flashlight. Three blinks - leave on the third blink.... She flicked the transbrake and immediately began building boost. She could hear Dog's car straining against his transbrake. She had no idea what he had in the car for a tranny - she just knew it was a high dollar auto or semi auto.

A moth fluttered in her headlights... down the "strip" she could see the headlights of a car marking the "finish".... 2psi.... 4psi.... the turbo was whining now, loudly... her car began to strain against the torque and she was sure she could feel it trying to tear the transbrake apart and slow the earth's rotation once it launched...

Dog had indeed hit his transbrake and then floored the throttle... His car sounded like it was missing but he knew it was angry - very angry - at being held in check. It too wanted to be freed from the mechanical shackles that bound it's soul....

Each driver watched the first blink....

blink

5psi... the roar of the V8 was now almost a staccato as it struggled to be released... the turbo beneath the long black hood of her GNX was now hissing and whistling, almost as Death itself must sound just before He pulls your last breath from your body...

Blink

6psi.... seconds seemed like minutes.... 8psi.... Brappp-apppappp-apppappp..... Her mind drifted into another zone now.... There was only silence to her... a drop of sweat slowly worked

it's way down her back and she realized that she was indeed hot....

Dog bit his lip and smiled... he knew what was going down, even if the hottie in the black car didn't....

BLINK

Within a nano second, over 1500 HP was unharnessed by the mere flicking of two electric switches.... Both cars lunged forward, the frames twisting, straining to release themselves of the massive torque loads being applied to the cold-formed steel.... Left front tires on both cars lifted, then slowly came back to earth as the combatants passed the 60' mark.... The slicks on both cars hooked perfectly and they left the line as if welded together... somewhere off in the distance a long, slow moving freight train's whistle blew and it's sound lazily hung in the night, but only those at the finish line could hear it. Everyone near the start line had their fingers in their ears to keep the roar from breaking their eardrums, the aroma of high octane being burnt in enormous volumes filling their nostrils....

Diana watched the tach and boost gauge out the corner of her eye... the boost was pegged at 27 psi, the tach swinging wildly with each up shift. She didn't know where the Camaro was at, nor did she care. Her focus was on the sound of her car and the rapidly approaching finish line. All she knew was that Dog's taillights were NOT in sight....

About 60' feet off the line, Dog hit the switch on the shifter. As soon as he did, huge solenoids opened and vaporized Nitrous Oxide poured into the intake tract of the Rat motor along with an equally proportionate amount of fuel. He could feel the added horsepower thrust him back into the Recarro seat. Yessss!!! Now THIS is how to move! He couldn't see the Buick but he could hear the whine of it's turbo in his left ear, even over his open piped Z. She had to be right with him...

Half-track... still, neck and neck... and now was when Dog hit switch number 2... Number 2 was hooked up to another NOS bottle and cascaded to another fuel line/injector that dumped

more raw fuel into the intake tract, fed from a 2.5-gallon tank filled with ultra high octane race fuel. His car now had at least 200 more horsepower than it did when he left the line.... Never had he been so violently thrown back as when the number 2 switch let the dogs loose.... He was sure that the tires broke loose for just an instant....

Diana heard a change in the sound of the Camaro... and she felt like somehow it was beginning to pull ahead.... But she would not look away... the finish line was nearing....

Dog looked over - incredulous that the Buick was still there. How could that be? And then, he was sure his eyes were deceiving him... it looked like the GNX was ever so slowly beginning to inch ahead!

Both cars crossed the line at what looked like the same time. But both spotters agreed - the Buick was leading, but barely by a fender. Still - a kill is a kill. The night rattled with the motors winding back down as the cars slowed to pull in an abandoned farmhouse lot and turn around heading back to the finish area. They pulled up and after idling for a few minutes, shut down and got out. Dog could only shake his head - no way he would have believed it if he hadn't been driving. He was so certain of his win that he had bragged to everyone about his upcoming date. But now - he was at her mercy....

"So, wassup? What's it gonna be?" he asked. She pulled her helmet up over her head and shook her long brown hair free. "Wear this shirt - every day for a week. That's part of it...." she said as she reached back in her car and pulled a pink T-shirt from the rear seat. On the front was a picture of her "X" and beneath it and also on the back was emblazoned the words "I was beaten - by a girl driving a V6."

"Sure - that ain't no thang!" Dog nervously laughed, everyone knowing how much trash Dog would endure for not only wearing a pink shirt but for losing. "But what else?" Diana just smiled.... "You ready? You really want to know?" Dog just nodded. "Go ahead... make my day."

"Ok, you've got to work with me at the garage for a week - for free. I want you to

show me all you know about nitrous because I've got an idea that I think will revolutionize modern day muscle cars if I can get it to work and if so, we won't have to worry about detonation again. I know that on the streets you are known as the nitrous boy, so work with me for a week. Who knows, maybe we'll both learn something!" Diana extended her hand and Dog shook it, smiling and thinking.... "Maybe she ain't so bad after all.... But Damn! Losing to a chick.... Now that's gonna be tough to explain....."