

Green Light

By Vanessa McKay

The Anketell Road overpass was clear in the afternoon sun. Green light. Clear intersection. My Mondeo, singing along to some forgotten song on the radio. My daughter's school, just five minutes away.

Then it struck.

It wasn't thunder, of course. It was three tonnes of commercial truck slamming into my driver's side door at eighty kilometres per hour. A screech of metal, explosion of air bags, shower of glass, the impossible force that sent my car spinning three times before slamming into a pedestrian barrier and laying it flat to the road.

Then silence. Not real silence—there were horns, shouts, someone calling an ambulance—but the silence of absence. The truck was gone, barrelling away down the freeway, its driver choosing flight over responsibility.

I learned later that the truck appeared to accelerate through the red light. No attempt to brake. No swerve to avoid impact. Just a deliberate push through an intersection it had no right to enter.

"You're lucky to be alive," said the paramedic as they fitted the neck brace.

Lucky wasn't how I'd describe the surgeries. The physiotherapy sessions that stretched into months, then years. Or the nightmares that still wake me, phantom metal crushing my legs all over again. Or the guilt – irrational but persistent – of not making it to school pickup that day, of the burden I became to my family.

The police searched. They checked traffic cameras, interviewed witnesses, put out calls for information. Nothing substantial materialised. The truck had been reported stolen the next day. Convenient. No fingerprints. No DNA. No justice.

That made me angry. The lack of consequences for whoever was behind the wheel. I imagined them driving around Perth today, still reckless, still impaired. Still a danger.

Senior Constable Mackenzie Parker stood at the same intersection on Anketell Road six months later, monitoring a routine RBT operation. The afternoon traffic stalled as drivers approached the line of officers.

Most people saw a delay in their commute. An inconvenience.

Mac saw something else entirely.

She saw the gouges still visible on the bitumen where my car had landed. She'd been first response that day. Had seen my conscious form trapped in the crumpled wreckage against the barrier. She coordinated the search for the hit-and-run driver that ultimately proved fruitless.

When the white sedan approached, the driver's nervous glance set off well-honed instincts. The breath test came back negative, but something wasn't right. Mac asked for license and registration.

"New to the area," the man explained, hands fidgeting with his wallet.

A standard check revealed an outstanding warrant—driving while disqualified three months prior. The man's shoulders slumped as Mac processed the information.

"You know, we had a serious accident right here," she said conversationally, nodding toward the intersection. "Hit and run. The victim's still in recovery. May never recover."

The man wouldn't meet her eyes.

"Driver was never found," Mac continued. "But we keep looking. Traffic cameras get better every year. Witnesses remember details months later. Technology improves. We find people eventually."

She processed the paperwork methodically, knowing this wasn't the hit-and-run driver, the timing didn't match, the vehicle type was wrong—but seeing in him the same disregard that truck driver had.

"You see a fine and a court date," Mac said as she handed over the citation. "I see a life potentially saved."

I roll my wheelchair to the edge of the courtyard at the rehabilitation centre, watching the traffic flow along the suburban road. The doctors reckon I'll walk unaided again, eventually. Small victories.

A police car passes, lights off, just routine patrol. Some drivers instinctively tap their brakes. Some check their speedometers. Some probably resent the presence.

I used to see only the enforcement side too, the fines, the inconvenience, the gotcha moments.

Now I see the empty wheelchair spaces beside me at physio, allocated to road trauma victims who never made it to rehabilitation.

I think about my unknown driver, still out there. I wonder if they've been stopped at an RBT since then. If a random licence check might have prevented them from taking the wheel that day, intoxicated or unlicensed or both.

When I see police on the road now, I don't see revenue raising or petty enforcement.

I see protection. I see prevention. I see the accident that might never happen because someone who shouldn't be driving is removed from the road.

I see the mother who makes it to school pickup. The daughter who doesn't have to wonder why Mum never arrived.

You might see a fine.

I see a life saved.