

Speed Kills

By [Starr](#)

It had been a long, hot, miserable day in Los Angeles County. The mercury had peaked early at a hundred and two and hovered there for the better part of the day. The promised rains had teased in the storm-darkened sky around two, but no relief was forthcoming, and the humidity level that resulted just made the heat even more unbearable.

Sitting in the passenger seat of the unairconditioned squad, Paramedic John Gage took a long pull on the soda that was pooling drops of condensation on the leg of his trousers. It had started out as an ice-cold bit of respite when they'd stopped at the burger place on their way back to the station, but it had quickly turned lukewarm and flat as the oppressive heat whittled the ice down to nothing. Now, it was just something wet to moisten his parched throat.

His partner, Roy DeSoto, eased the squad out of the left lane of the freeway and into the center one, passing a slow moving Buick that was holding back the traffic in the fast lane by doing a whopping thirty five. The bun of blue hair that rose above the steering wheel turned in his direction, the wrinkled face below it barely visible. "Speed kills, young man!" came warbling out of her open window. Roy glanced over at his partner, who was smirking. "We still have to decide what we're making for dinner at the station tonight," he commented.

Johnny groaned, the smirk gone. "Man, I don't even want to *think* about cooking in this heat." He drained the last of the soda and tossed the empty cup down next to his feet. "How about if we -- WATCH OUT!"

Roy saw the swerving Camero at the same instant and slammed on the brakes, bracing himself for what he thought would be an inevitable collision. The squad shuddered and squealed, then finally came back under his control, the front bumper coming within scant inches of the back spoiler of the much smaller sports car. The Camero, not satisfied with his new position, which placed him directly in back of a large flatbed truck, darted over to the right lane, oblivious to the screech of tires and blaring horn of the Chevy he cut off.

"What does that idiot think he's doing?" Johnny yelled angrily. His heart was thumping hard in his chest, and one hand still firmly clutched the dash in front of him.

"He's gonna get someone killed, that's what he's doing," Roy replied tightly, his own pulse up to about twice its normal rate.

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the foolhardy Camero made another quick lane change, this time cutting off the flatbed truck. The truck's brake lights came on, and there was a horrid squeal as they locked up, smoke spewing from the large tires as they overheated from being dragged along the pavement. The truck started to shimmy as the driver fought to keep it under control, but the harder he tried, the more the truck fought against him. The cargo of long steel rods on the flatbed strained against the straps that held them down, throwing the truck even more out of balance until finally one of the straps snapped under the strain, sending the rods spilling over the side and onto the roadway. This threw the truck's center of balance totally off, and the cab jackknifed as the bed started to heave to the side.

Everything after that went into slow motion. Cars on both sides of the truck started to collide as they desperately tried to avoid both the rods and the truck itself. The squad had nowhere to go, and drove directly over the rods, sending the tires spinning in a vain attempt to find enough traction to stop. The truck

rammed the van that was in front of it, and the squad rammed the flatbed. The sudden deceleration sent the now liberated steel rods catapulting from the bed and raining down on the front of the helpless squad.

Chaos reigned for the eternity of twenty seconds, the full time it took from the Camero's initiating move to the pileup that ground the freeway to a dead stop.

Then, there was silence.

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The first thing Roy was aware of as he lifted his head from the steering wheel was that he couldn't see anything. There was a moment of sheer panic before he realized that his "blindness" was caused by the entire windshield having been shattered, rendering it opaque. *'Thank God for safety glass,'* he thought with relief, the image of what would have happened otherwise leaving a disturbing picture in his mind. Raising a hand to his throbbing head, he winced as his fingers found the lump that was already forming. His neck was complaining loudly, too, as was his left shoulder, but everything seemed to be where it was supposed to be and was still doing what it was supposed to be doing, so he decided to count himself fortunate.

It was then that it dawned on him that he hadn't yet heard his partner stir next to him.

"Johnny, you okay?" he croaked, tasting the blood in his mouth for the first time. His partner's head was slumped, chin resting on his chest, but it was his upright posture that set off a warning bell inside Roy's fuzzy brain. The force of the impact should have sent him forward into the dash, just as it had sent Roy into the steering wheel.

"Johnny?" he said again, worry creeping into his voice. There was something very, very wrong, and his sluggish brain just wasn't catching what it was. Until he reached over to check on his unconscious friend. Then it hit him. Several of the steel rods had penetrated the windshield. One was sunk into the rear of the cab, mere inches from Johnny's head. The second had hit lower and to the left, catching the paramedic through the left chest, impaling him and holding him upright against the back of the cab.

A wave up fear rose up and threatened to carry Roy under, but he took a deep breath and pushed it down, knowing that if he didn't, it could very well mean his friend's life. He reached over, careful to avoid the rods, and touched Johnny's neck. Finding a pulse, he whispered a small prayer of thanks before grabbing the mike from the radio. "Dispatch, this is Squad 51. Be advised we've been involved in a multiple vehicle accident, Midtown Freeway, west of the Fulton Avenue on-ramp. I have one Code-I and unknown other injuries. Request you dispatch Engine 51 and at least one other squad and engine to this location."

He barely heard the acknowledgment or the call as it went out over the air, instead turning his attentions to his wounded partner. It was a good-news, bad-news situation. The good news was that the rod that had skewered him was relatively small, only about a half inch in diameter, and had gone in through his upper left chest, high enough to miss both the heart and lungs. The flip-side was that the rod, rather than being smooth, was threaded, and had done much more damage going in than it might otherwise have. The blood that was quickly saturating his uniform shirt told of a serious injury, one that could still be life-threatening if they couldn't get him to Rampart fast enough.

Intending to get the trauma box and biophone, Roy pushed on his door, but it wouldn't budge. He threw his shoulder into it, a poor decision since the door remained jammed shut and the impact jarred his already injured shoulder, making his vision dance with white spots until he could catch his breath. He briefly considered crawling out the window, but it had been half up when they impacted, and now it wouldn't move at all, no matter how hard he cranked the handle.

Sirens began to wail in the distance, and he turned his attention back to Johnny, taking his pulse and checking his pupils, then sitting back to wait in frustrated helplessness until the cavalry arrived.

* * *

Pain. Bright, hot, searing pain. The sheer intensity of it brought Johnny back from the realm of unconsciousness. Burning. Something was burning his chest. He had to get it away, had to stop the pain...

As his right hand moved reflexively towards the source of his pain, it was grasped by someone, holding it at bay. His eyes fluttered open as he fought against the grasp. "Hurts," he hissed.

The owner of the restraining hand spoke softly. "I know, buddy. Just hang in there. Help's on the way."

The voice was familiar, but the intense buzzing that was filling his head made it impossible to identify. All he knew was that he was in pain, and he was being kept from removing the source. "Burns," he groaned, trying again to break free. He moved to his left, and the pain flared white hot, leaving him without breath, then blessed darkness descended.

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Roy clasped Johnny's hand in his, his gut wrenching at the pain in his friend's voice. His eyes once again went to the rod that had so narrowly missed Johnny's head. If that had been two inches to the left, it would've all been over in a heartbeat. Conversely, if the second rod had been two inches to the right, it might've merely given the dark haired paramedic a flesh wound and fodder for drumming up sympathy among the nursing staff at Rampart. Fate was fickle.

A face suddenly appeared at Johnny's open window. "Hey, guys, what..." Chet trailed off, his eyes growing wide as he took in the sight before him.

"Chet, see if you can get Johnny's door open," Roy ordered quickly.

It took a second for him to regain his bearing, but Chet grabbed the door and gave a few hard tugs. He shook his head. "Jammed."

"Mine is, too. Get them popped as quick as you can."

The fireman darted away, and the concerned face of Captain Stanley replaced his in the window. "My God," he said softly. He tore his eyes from the blood-soaked form of the younger half of his paramedic team and looked to Roy. "How bad is he?"

"Bad," was all Roy could trust himself to say. He truly had no way of determining the extent of his partner's injuries, but the steady flow of blood was marking the loss of precious time in Johnny's "golden hour" that they would never get back.

"What do you need?" Hank asked, his tone saying that he would wrestle the Devil himself if need be to get whatever he asked for.

"The biophone," Roy said. "And the trauma box."

Marco was standing behind Hank, and was already rushing to the rear compartments before Roy was done

speaking. He was back in less than twenty seconds, handing Hank the trauma box and passing the biophone through the window to Roy.

“Rampart, this is Squad 51, over.” While he waited for a response, he took a new set of vitals, writing them on the back of his hand. The low blood pressure reading worried him.

“Squad 51, this is Rampart, go ahead.”

“Rampart, we have a male firefighter, age 28, who is the victim of a motor vehicle accident. Vitals to follow.” He read the stats off his hand, making sure to note the difference with the readings he’d taken less than five minutes before.

“Roger, 51. Do you have an ambulance at your location at this time?”

Hank shook his head, so Roy replied, “Negative, Rampart. We also have another problem. The victim is currently pinned inside the vehicle by a steel rod that has penetrated the upper left quadrant. We are attempting to extricate at this time.” The words sounded cool and professional coming out of his mouth, but inside he could feel the panic skulking about, getting ready to try and take hold again.

There was a short but telling pause before the reply came. “Roger, 51. Can you describe the object and the extent of the wound?”

Roy took a deep breath. “The rod is approximately one half inch in diameter, and appears to be threaded along its entire length. One end has penetrated the victim below the left collarbone. The wound is bleeding profusely, Rampart. It’s possible it may have damaged an artery.”

“Can you tell how far in the object has penetrated?”

Roy nearly had to shout to be heard over the roar of the Jaws as Chet pried open the driver’s side door. “Negative, Rampart. We haven’t been able to determine that yet.”

“51, start an IV, D5W, TKO, and readvise with vitals every five minutes.”

“10-4, Rampart.” Roy maneuvered in the awkward space of the cab to set up the IV that Hank passed in to him on Johnny’s right arm, then packed the wound around the base of the rod with gauze to help staunch the flow of blood. Both doors were off of the squad in record time, and Chet exchanged the Jaws for the K-12 saw to sever the rod.

It was the worst possible time for Johnny to regain consciousness, so of course he did.

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Johnny swam around in a fog of semi-consciousness, taking in the noises, the voices, understanding bits and pieces of what he heard, but mostly it was just an unintelligible garble. It was the tone of Roy’s voice, then, and not his words, that gave him cause for concern. He’d heard the tone before, the tightly controlled, professional tone, the one he used whenever he was really worried about something and wouldn’t let it show for the patient’s sake. Johnny knew that whoever Roy was talking about was probably in a pretty bad way.

Several minutes passed before the thought solidified in his slobby brain that it was most probably *him* that Roy was talking about. Damn.

Forcing his eyes open, he blinked slowly, trying to focus, not quite succeeding. The first thing he could make out was his right arm cradled on his lap, an IV line attached to it. The line extended out of his view, out the open door of the squad. Where was the door? He'd have to ask Roy where it had gotten to when he could get his mouth working again.

His shirt felt wet and sticky against his chest and stomach. His first thought was that he'd spilled his soda in the accident. Damn, that meant having to change when they got back to the station. No, wait, he'd finished his soda, hadn't he? Still unable to pick his chin up off his chest, he glanced to his left, trying to see what he'd gotten on himself if not soda.

Even in his less than lucid state, he knew blood when he saw it. Red, wet, warm... Yup, that was blood, all right. What he couldn't figure out was what that metal pole was doing sticking out of his chest.

His brain chugged to put the pieces together for him.

Oh...

With great effort, he pulled his head back so he could see more than his own legs. Roy's anxious face hovered close to his. "Johnny?"

'*Quit yellin*,' Johnny thought with a wince. He'd kill for some aspirin right about now. No, actually, something a little stronger might be nice. As a matter of fact, the more he thought about it, staying unconscious probably would've been his best option. The more aware he became, the worse the pain grew in ever increasing spirals. Why didn't they take the pole out? Why didn't they just grab it and pull it out and make the pain go away? He could do it himself. If he could move. He had to tell Roy to take it out. Roy was his friend. He wouldn't let him stay in pain. All he had to do was open his mouth and tell him to take the pole out of his chest, and everything would be better.

Instead of words, a dry cough came out, small, but enough to move his body in such a way as to elicit a bright flash of pain. He was sure someone was scrambling his insides with a white-hot poker. Tears streamed down his cheeks as he fought off the blackness that was circling and coming in to grab him. '*Gotta stay awake.*'

He heard Roy's voice again, less controlled than before, then felt a small pinch in his right arm. Now what? How many holes were they going to put in him, anyway? Roy knew how he felt about needles...

The wave of pain rolled back, and a sense of blissful numbness started to creep through him. Drugs. They'd given him something for the pain. Smart man, that Roy.

Then the darkness claimed him anyway.

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"10-4, Rampart, MS has been administered." Roy watched as Johnny's face went from contorted with pain to slack with unconsciousness. "The patient is still fading in and out of consciousness."

"Roger, 51. Monitor vitals, and advise when the patient can be transported."

Taking the yellow blanket Hank was holding, Roy draped it loosely over Johnny's face, then nodded to Chet, who put the saw into motion. It bit into the rod, sending a shower of sparks through the cab, and in

less than a minute it was cut through.

Roy kept a firm grip on Johnny, but the anticipated increase in dead body weight didn't come when the rod was severed. A sick feeling came over him, and he slid his hand down the back of Johnny's shoulder. Even with the pain meds, the contact elicited a choked moan.

His worst suspicions confirmed, Roy looked over at Hank. "We have a problem."

Afraid to hear what could possibly be wrong now, Hank asked, "What?"

His eyes meeting Hank's, Roy said as levelly as possible, "It goes all the way through. Into the back of the cab."

"Juss keeps gettin' better 'n better," Johnny muttered, his words slurring slightly.

Roy winced. If he'd known Johnny was awake again, he would've.... What? What would he have done? His partner might be hurt, but he wasn't stupid. "Johnny, you back with us?"

"F'now," came the labored reply.

"We've got a little problem here, pal."

"Heard."

"We need to get the rod cut behind you to get you out."

"S'do it."

"The problem is getting to it to cut it." Roy tried to catch his partner's gaze, but his heavy-lidded eyes were still unfocused. "We have to bring you forward a couple of inches to get the saw behind you."

There was a moment of silence.

"Johnny?" Roy questioned, thinking he'd passed out again.

"Do it."

Roy's brow wrinkled. "You know we could do more damage --"

"Do it," Johnny repeated. He held up his hand. It glistened brightly with blood. "No time f'anything else."

Roy chewed on his lip a second, then touched his friend's arm. "Be right back."

With an attempt at a grin, Johnny replied, "I'll wait here."

Once out of the squad, Roy huddled with Hank and the rest of the men, all of them oblivious to the pandemonium going on around them. 27's had arrived to take care of the other victims of the accident. Right now, they existed in their own little universe, and it revolved around Johnny.

"We only need to expose a few inches of the rod," Roy explained, careful to keep his voice from carrying back to Johnny's ears. "But it's gonna hurt like hell when we move him."

“Isn’t there any other way to cut him out?” Chet asked.

Roy shook his head. “We don’t have time to cut the whole squad apart. If we don’t get him to Rampart soon -- real soon -- he’s gonna bleed to death.”

“But we could also kill him by moving him those few inches,” Hank pointed out.

“Yeah.” Roy’s eyes lowered, as did his voice. “We could.”

Hank allowed himself a moment to think the situation through, but it was clear that their options were limited to bad and worse. “Kelly,” he said finally, “get the K-12.”

Roy stayed outside the squad this time, letting Chet get in so he’d have a better angle with the saw. “You want me to ask Rampart about giving you something more for the pain?” he asked. When Johnny shook his head, Roy took a firm hold on his torso. “Okay, nice and slow, straight ahead,” he instructed Chet, who held a similar grip from the other side. “Ready?” he asked Johnny one last time.

“Do I have a choice?” Johnny joked weakly.

“’fraid not.”

“Then I guess I’m ready.” He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, anticipating the pain that was about to follow, but still unprepared when it hit, ripping through his chest like a bulldozer.

Roy cringed at the strangled cry that came through Johnny’s tightly clenched lips, but he didn’t let up. To stop and then start again would just make it worse than to do the whole thing in one swift motion.

“Okay, that’s good!” Chet yelled. He grabbed the K-12 and carefully maneuvered it behind Johnny, painfully aware of how close the blade was to the paramedic, but he held it steady and made a quick cut through the rod.

Johnny’s body weight collapsed into Roy’s firm grasp. “Old bat was right,” he managed to whisper before fading into oblivion, “speed kills.”

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They were speeding down the freeway, cars a mere blur as they streaked past, the speedometer creeping up to seventy, eighty, ninety, and then the windshield shattered, sending thousands of razor-sharp shards of glass flying in on them. He looked over at his partner and saw him covered in blood, holding out his hands, seeking, begging for help, a hand covered with blood --

“Roy?”

Jerking awake, Roy nearly tipped over the chair he’d been slumped down in. He blinked quickly, trying to get his bearings. They’d been in the squad, and now... The familiar ache in his back clued him in. Rampart. Right. Only Rampart had chairs this uncomfortable.

Joanne peered down at him, her brow furrowed. “Sweetheart, are you okay?”

Pulling himself upright, Roy rubbed a hand over his face, the events of the past few hours coming back to

him in a headache inducing rush. He managed a smile for her. "Yeah, I'm fine. Just had a bad dream."

She nodded knowingly and handed him a steaming styrofoam cup. "Coffee?"

"Thanks." He took a grateful sip, ignoring the pain that flared in his split lip.

Stepping next to him, Joanne rubbed a hand absently across her husband's shoulder. "He's going to be fine."

Roy glanced over at the sleeping form on the hospital bed a few yards away. It had taken a frantic dash to the emergency room, a Herculean effort on the part of Doctor Brackett and his people, and almost four pints of precious blood in the operating room, but Johnny had somehow managed to hang on through it all. He'd be out of work for quite some time while he recovered his strength and the full use of his right arm, but all the doctors who'd strolled in to see him over the last six hours had agreed that he was going to be fine.

But Roy was still going to stick around until he woke up. Just because.

* * *

Standing in front of the hospital elevator, Roy kept a firm grip on the plate of cookies that Joanne had pressed into his hands right before he'd left the house. He'd almost dumped them on the ground twice already -- once getting into the car, and again getting out -- and he wasn't taking any chances.

He'd come to visit Johnny pretty much every day since the accident, and while he wouldn't admit it to anyone, he was worried about his friend's recovery. The doctors assured him everything was healing fine, but as the days wore on, the more Johnny just didn't seem... like Johnny. He was quiet, hardly keeping up his half of the conversation most of the time, letting even Chet's best barbs pass without challenge. This was disquieting enough, but he barely even reacted to the nurses that kept buzzing around him. That was downright unnatural, but Roy had yet to figure out how to explain this particular symptom to the doctors.

Dixie McCall rounded the corner and smiled as she approached. "Hi, Roy."

"Hey, Dixie."

The head nurse eyed the tinfoil covered plate. "Present for Johnny?"

Roy gave an almost self-conscious smile. "Joanne baked him some cookies. She thought it might, you know, help cheer him up."

"Well," Dixie replied, smirking slightly, "I don't think you'll need to worry about that."

Perplexed, Roy frowned. "Oh?"

The smirk turned to a Cheshire grin. "I gave Johnny a little present of my own."

Now both perplexed and intrigued, he asked, "What did you give him?"

Dixie batted her eyes innocently as the elevator doors opened. "You'll see." With a wave, she walked off.

Roy rode to the third floor, then hurried down to Johnny's room, his curiosity burning brightly. He found Johnny sitting up in bed, his face animated for the first time as he chatted up the nurse who was fussing over

his pillows. Married wasn't dead, and even Roy felt an instant of jealousy as she leaned over his partner. Even with just a profile to judge by, she looked as though she could've stepped right off the page of Playboy. "Am I interrupting?"

Johnny tore his eyes from his personal angel and grinned across the room at him. "Hey, Roy! Come on in!" He took obvious pleasure in performing the introductions. "Maxine, this is Roy. Roy, this is Maxine."

A perfect set of white teeth nearly blinded him. "So *you're* the one he's always talking about."

Johnny's face colored in embarrassment. "Well, not always," he stammered in his own defense.

Seeing that his partner was in good hands, Roy held out the cookies, which by comparison to Dixie's idea of a pick-me-up seemed lame. "Joanne thought you might be sick of hospital food by now."

Johnny tore the foil off and didn't waste any time shoving one into his mouth. "Oatmeal raisin!" he exclaimed happily. "These are great, Roy. Be sure to thank Joanne for me."

"Sure." Sensing that three was very quickly becoming a crowd, he added, "I have to get going, actually, so maybe I'll stop by later and see how you're doing."

"Sure, sure, later's good," Johnny agreed, his eyes on Maxine as she walked across the room to refill his water pitcher. "Isn't she somethin'?" he asked in a conspiratorial whisper.

"Yeah," Roy agreed, "she's something alright." He grabbed a cookie from the plate. "Just remember, partner, speed kills." The last thing he heard as he left the room was Maxine saying, "It's time for your sponge bath, Mr. Gage." Munching on the cookie he'd snaked, he walked to the elevator with a huge grin, the lead weight that had ridden in his belly for the past week disappearing. '*Dixie,*' he thought with a chuckle, '*you're a genius!*'