

That summer is full of black cars.

It is full of many things, but above all are the cars. She sees them in everything she looks at afterwards—in the oil slicks of the road, in the dottings of the rain as it pellets the sidewalk in puddles and gobs, in the sheen of her mirror as she undresses in the dark. In these are the memories, and they come to her slowly, quietly, easy enough to push away.

But they are *out there*, too. She passes them with her own aged, shy sedan, a reliable but nearly forgotten relic that blurs against their slick, clear lines. They pass her in the evenings as she walks the endless loop of her small neighborhood. Their sides bead with the sweat of raindrops, for it is a wet summer; they weep shadowy tears as they speed away from her, turning their sharp corners, never to be seen again.

Or they would be, if there were not so many of them. Legions travel beside her everywhere she goes. Black cars follow her to the supermarket and crowd around her sedan in the parking lot. On her various commutes she counts them, the rows and rows of black cars, following obediently the traffic signals and flow of the roadway. One car, two, three, five, like a swarm of ants to a drizzle of honey. People who enter her work come and go in black cars. One of her coworkers drives a blue car, navy like a lake's face at night, but in the darkness of the endless cloud cover it may as well be black. And when it isn't raining, when it's bright enough to bring out her sunglasses, the lenses cast the cars in black.

Her head is full of them.

It becomes strange if she goes a day without seeing them. She notes them as she goes to shop, to the library, to the bank. Without thinking she parks next to one at the bookstore. Her face swims into view across the passenger-side window, her eyes hidden behind her dark sunglasses, or smeared with the drips of water that cloud the glass. As she heads inside, she passes someone walking out who looks like *someone*, someone she might have known, sometime. She turns to watch him. He goes to his car, unlocks the door, deposits his purchases in the back seat, and then situates himself in the front seat and turns the key in the ignition. His black car carries him away, and she considers waving. She does not.

They all look the same. Smooth, smoldering exteriors, the thin, sweeping lines and dark, solemn front bumpers that serve for faces. Even the tail ends are impressive, their trunks sliding so tightly over the back bumper, keeping everything tucked inside. They are beautiful on the outside, these black cars.

She sometimes imagines what they look like on the inside.

She wonders if their insides share the captivating sleekness of their outsides—whether or not they are impeccable and well-adjusted, or if there are old receipts and loose change bounding around under the seats, CDs without boxes and gum wrappers and old bottles squatting beneath passengers' feet from time to time. It occurs to her that many cars are not as tidy as her own: her sedan is well-preserved for its age, meticulously vacuumed and waxed at regular intervals. These cars are not likely to be cared for thus, yet she knows one that is. Or was.

Sometimes—she tries not to—she wonders what it would be like to sit inside one of those cars. Her eyes close, and she imagines riding in the passenger's seat, feeling the firm upholstery beneath her, comforting in its stability. She does not have to worry about where

she's being taken, but she wouldn't be worried anyway. She feels safe in the darkness, in the still blackness of this black car.

She wonders what they smell like. She breathes in, and she smells the chill of a gloaming dusk at the very birth of spring, the vague misty air seeping in through the windows. The promise of May is mixing with the smell of evening, of too late in the evening, of a night which emerges clouded and starless. Faint odors of exhaust waft inside almost imperceptibly, merged with the oceanic sounds of a highway half a mile off, from which they come. Curiously, the open windows do not diminish the heady aroma of men's cologne, unidentifiable by name but unmistakable in nature.

Would the scent of another driver fill this space so mightily? Her eyes close, and she sees him sitting beside her in the driver's seat. She wonders if the other drivers look like him — if they all have hair as shiny and neatly-groomed as his, skin as smooth as his, eyes as dark as his. These eyes are fixed on her, slow and intent, and she is conscious of her position in the passenger's seat. She notes the distance between them, the short bulwark made by the storage compartment. Little note does he seem to take of this. His hand comes across the gap to rest upon her cheek.

The other people who own these black cars, what would their palms feel like if they were to rest against her face? Would her head lie so well against their shoulder, her forehead pressed against the warm flesh of their neck? She thinks about another driver's hand coming towards her, settling upon her knee, moving to her side to pull her close to him. She feels the movements of his fingers in her hair, curling at the nape of her neck. Hesitantly, her fingertips brush the shape of his jawline, feel the skin of his throat. He watches her, slowly, watches her beneath his touch and his eyes. There is darkness in the space between his parted lips.

She wonders if any of them taste the way he does.