

Story for performance #929
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Tags: [travel](#), [violence](#)

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Her experience with motor vehicles could be divided into three eras, just like her life. But it wasn't until the last era that she began to think of things in this way. It was better than thinking about the other thing, her premonitions, her involvement with...

Better start at the beginning.

First, there was the era of family cars. She remembered the first car her family had—an old green Dodge. It was round and stable. A very safe car. But this wasn't the car that stuck in her mind, no...it was the white Chevy with a red stripe and big fins. This car was owned by the son of her mother's best friend. She had a terrible crush on that boy. Every day, after school, she waited at the living room window to see if he'd drive by.

Meanwhile, she went to school, often sitting next to a guy who read magazines for hot-rod buffs. She helped him with grammar—he was a bit of a dolt, but really very sweet. She couldn't remember his name. Nor could she remember the name of the boy who drove the white Chevy and wasn't interested in her at all.

This era, the era of family cars, was normal in many ways. It was an era of growing up in suburbia, of secretly listening to jazz late at night and imagining another life. It was also the first time that she discovered her talent for avoiding violence.

One hot summer night she was about to fall asleep; something told her to lock up. She closed the window and lay in bed trembling. The next morning, she heard her parents whispering.

'Next door? Stabbed—she's only 14. Stabbed 14 times. Weird number fetish? Incredible—in the hospital—she's still alive after all that.'

In her second era of motor vehicles, she owned her own cars. First, there was the jade green Chevrolet. She liked the color of that car. Then, there was the dark blue Dodge. Everyone laughed at her—she called it her spy mobile. It really was much too serious a car. Finally, she bought a grey Toyota and after that she had a red Subaru station wagon. It was her last car.

In these cars, she felt free. She took long road trips, drove across the country and back—from New York to San Francisco—she took every possible route. It's good to know the country, to see how big it is, really how big—in miles and miles, driving for hours. And each place had those little motels, now owned by people from India, so you would smell the curry and go out to eat hamburgers. She sometimes drove with a friend, sometimes alone. She was a good driver; she drove fast but not in a dangerous way. People depended on her—to take them someplace exciting.

One evening, in Ward, Colorado, at a rock concert and benefit for the town, she got that feeling again. I have to get out of here.

She wasn't there when the coke dealers started a

fight with the poets. A lot of broken bones, she heard later, but at least no one died.

When her last car broke down on the way to Philadelphia, she started the third phase of her life with motor vehicles. It all started when she met Chuck. He was one of those big guys, really big, with a beard and a gentle smile. She liked the way his muscles bulged out of his t-shirt. He rode an old black Harley, so she knew he had taste. They started hanging out together. And that's how she found herself starting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin—on the back of the bike—on a three week trip down the Mississippi River roads—part of a group of bikes that hogged the road. What a wild ride for an intellectual who had spent her whole life in the city, reading books and writing essays. This was something out of a fantasy—wonderful—until it turned on her with a slap in the face.

One night there was a party—some small town south of St. Louis—everyone was drinking beer and whooping it up—she was sitting a bit out of the light, just watching. Then, she felt it, a strange premonition.

She grabbed Chuck and said: 'We have to get out of here.'

He looked at her like she was crazy, but when she insisted, he drove her back to the motel. He was pissed off and drunk. Roared out of there. Wouldn't listen to her. Back to the party.

In the morning, he hadn't returned. She turned on the TV. On the news, they were saying something about a shooting. The facts slowly penetrated her consciousness, though she didn't want to hear them. Someone had walked into the party with a rifle...

'Looks like no survivors.'

'Chuck!' she thought. 'And Abby and Peter and Beth and...'

She called a cab.

'Take me to the nearest airport,' she said.

She went home and slept for days. Should she have called the police? What could she say? That she had a sixth sense for violence, that she somehow always knew to get out of there before it happened. To save herself. Or maybe, she'd have to say that the violence came when she was there, or maybe she caused it. Or maybe it was a result of her life with motor vehicles.

No, better to sleep, to stay home, stay out of trouble. Stay away from cars and motorcycles, even bicycles—would she have to stay away from taxis and buses? What about the subway?

'Walking is good exercise,' she thought. 'I'll walk everywhere from now on.'

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ellen Zweig.