

Beep Beep, Beep Beep, Yeah

“No kidding,” Chuck replied into the phone.

“A Buick, a ’70 Wildcat,” his father said. “Last year they made ‘em. Mrs. Sibley from church, she’s moving to Florida to be with her kids. It was sitting in her garage ever since Sibley died, and she wanted to get rid of it. I gave her fifteen hundred.”

Chuck covered the receiver and announced to his boyfriend, “Dad has officially started his Midlife Crisis: he’s bought himself a Muscle Car.”

“455 V-8 in there,” Mr. McDonough was saying, “and a four-barrel carb – roars like a friggin’ lion.”

“Floats like a butterfly, stings like a bee,” Chuck replied. “What kind of mileage does it get?” Jeff asked.

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Mr. McDonough’s fondness of cars was not a passion; but rather a sort of standard feature on a mid-60’s-vintage American dad. Cars were something men did: they were in charge of the garage, like their wives were in charge of the kitchen. Chuck did not own a car, nor did Jeff. Chuck saw no need to, since they lived in the East Village, two blocks from a subway. Mr. McDonough couldn’t understand this (along with many other things about Chuck). If you were a normal American guy, with a regular income and full use of your senses, you got a car. Yeah, parking’s tough, but so? You keep looking and are quick on the gas, and you’ll find something. You don’t have a car, you gotta wait on everybody else, you get left behind. Mr. McDonough had never lived in the city (Chuck would remind himself, taking a deep breath).

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Chuck went down to Point Pleasant for the filial duty of family dinner. He expected that Jeff was expecting him to announce their marriage plans. This was a bombshell he didn’t want to drop until just the right moment, just the right opening – pinpoint bombing in the familial wars, as it were – even though he could pretty much guess how they’d react. His father would look disgusted but say nothing. His mother would look worried and out of her depth. Carol, his older sister, would assume her iciest Snow Queen expression of fundamentalist disapproval. His younger sister Audrey would be delighted.

His father and Audrey met him in the Buick. It looked like a muscle car, no less and no more: broad hood, squared-off back end, racing-stripe ridges streamlining back from the thick-tired wheels. The top was cream-colored, the body a dull maroon. It looked like the kind of car driven by the kind of guys Chuck had had crushes on in high school. He expected his father to be a-swagger with pride of purchase, but Audrey did all the enthusing. “Is this not totally rad? It’s the coolest thing he’s bought in like forever. A Land Yacht!”

“We’ll get some cheap champagne and you can launch it,” Chuck said. “Call it the *S.S. Mammothtub*.”

She mimed crashing a bottle. “He wouldn’t let me, it’d scratch the paint or something. Wouldn’t you?” she asked her father, who said nothing.

They went by the Ben Franklin where she worked, so she could check the new schedule. Mr. McDonough was at the wheel, Chuck in the back seat. There was a silence. Then the car spoke. “So’s this your kid who’s the fag?”