

I heard the clunking engine approaching long before it actually triggered the drive-thru intercom. My headset beeped and I rolled my eyes. I pressed the transmit button. "Thanks for choosing Burger World. How can I help you?"

The driver yelled, straining to be heard over the noises from under the hood. "Just a cheeseburger! Thanks, lady!"

I punched the order into the register and read the total as if I didn't have it memorized by now. "That'll be a dollar eighty-two at the window. Thank you." The sound grew worse and worse as he rolled through the drive-thru in his rustbucket and approached. When I opened the window it was almost unbearable. The man behind the wheel waved and offered up two crumpled bills.

He waved his hand as I tried to pass him the change. I gave him a half-nod and dropped it in the tip cup, bringing our total up to nineteen cents on the day.

"Hey," I said as I turned back to the prep line. "Is that cheeseburger coming up?"

"Yeah," my boss shouted over the sound of boiling oil and the jalopy waiting for it. "Three minutes!"

I turned and leaned out the window, trying to gesture that it would just be a couple minutes. He shook his head and turned the car off. Suddenly there was a peaceful stillness. [i]This must be what people feel when they meditate[/i], I thought. "Sorry about that," he laughed. "I don't like it anymore than you do, I promise."

I grinned. "No worries. I guess you... get used to it? Just a minute on the burger."

"You would think so," he half-shouted back. "But it's as annoying as ever. Last day with it, though. I'm finally upgrading. Was planning to just junk this one. Know anyone who wants to buy a car?"

"Well, I'm in the market for something that'll get me the six miles here and back a few times a week. But..."

"Like you said, you get used to it. How 'in the market' are you? I'll give you a fair price."

"I'm not sure what a fair price for [i]that[/i] would be," I laughed.

"Well, think about it. Like I said, I was planning to junk it." The burger finally arrived--I bagged it and handed it over. "I'll come back in a few hours. If you're still here I'll sell it to you for whatever you've got on you."

I nodded, doubting I'd see him again. He smiled and let me close the window before he started the rustbucket again.

"That's the worst car I've ever seen," my boss said.

"Okay," I laughed. "It's just a car, and we work at Burger World."

"I hate it so much. It gives me a visceral reaction. That vehicle is a war crime."

"What do you drive again?"

He scowled. "Public Transportation is the backbone of the modern city."

"It sure is, Mike."

After Rusty Car Guy and a couple other customers came through, the "lunch rush" was over and I spent the rest of the afternoon dreaming of the car I'd [i]actually[/i] buy when I had the cash. As much as I liked to tease Mike about taking the bus, we were on the same route most days. But not forever!

I stopped working around 4:50 (and punched out at 5:00, of course). It was still twenty minutes until our bus came, so I sat outside the restaurant and offered Mike a cigarette.

"Thanks," he muttered as he joined me at the table and lit up.

We heard the noise at the same time. The cig just about fell out of his mouth.

"Well, well, well." I smiled. "Looks like your favorite vehicle in the world is here."

The sound grew steadily louder as it approached. He made a show of sticking his fingers in his ears, but he couldn't wipe the grin off my face.

Rusty Car Guy pulled into the parking lot with a much nicer sedan following close behind. He parked it a few feet away from us and swung the door open. "Told you I'd be back," he laughed. "I had to convince my wife it was going to a good home." He jerked his thumb at the other car, where a woman waved from the driver's seat.

"So how much do you want for it?" I asked.

"Two hundred?"

I shook my head. "I can maybe manage one?"

He thought for a moment. "You know what? I feel like I had a two hundred dollar burger today." He pulled the keys from his pocket and dropped them on the table.

I blushed. "Are you sure?"

"Trust me. The homeowners association is gonna run us out of town if we don't stop... '[i]noise polluting[/i]'. " He made a face. "I'll come back later this week for us to handle the paperwork and everything, but it's yours."

"I can't thank you enough," I told him.

"It's really nothing. Drive safe." With a grin, he walked around to the passenger side of the new car and he was gone.

"Hold on." Mike walked inside while I inspected my new ride.

I tapped my foot, waiting impatiently.

He returned a couple minutes later with a french fry jammed in each ear.

I stuck my tongue out. "Get in." He nodded.

The key turned and the motor started. From inside, the sound really wasn't that bad as long as I kept the windows closed. I'd have to replace it sooner or later, but for the moment everything was perfect.

I yelled along with every song on the radio as I drove Mike home, figuring he could pay for a taxi if he didn't appreciate my vocal stylings.

"Thanks for the ride," he shouted as I idled in his driveway. "Pick me up tomorrow?"

I sneered. "Apologize to Rusty first."

"Who's-- oh." An exaggerated sigh. "Rusty, I am very sorry for calling you ugly and loud. I wasn't wrong, but it's part of your charm."

"It certainly is," I reminded him with a smile. "See you tomorrow."

I floored it as I hit the highway on the way home. [i]This rules[/i].

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Levitation or rust, huh

Okay. things that levitate:

Wizards

Hovercrafts

???

Things that rust:
Metal
Hovercrafts?

What if a wizard played basketball and nobody could prove they were a wizard.

Okay, not basketball. What if they were an olympic high jumper or pole vaulter or hmm

What if there was a door that had been rusted shut for decades and one day someone hears a sound behind it

What IF there was a space probe or something and it was on a desert planet but they noticed it was rusting (which would signify water and/or oxygen?) -- alright. I don't think i'm going to think of anything better than that. So whats the plot

Plot outline:

Some underpaid intern's job is to monitor old nasa probe video -- no one expects they'll find anything

One day they notice that the field of view has started to narrow? Or something. And the camera is rusting? No that's bad

Upon reflection, this idea is bad.

New idea. Restoring a rusty car. But the car is cursed. By a levitating wizard. That's a crossover, baby.

No.

What about learning to drive? Or buying a car. Buying a car and finding drugs in it. That feels cheap.

Okay. there are some ideas there.

Well, I better start writing.

I'm sure spending 42 minutes on bad ideas is optimal for a two hour contest.

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Alright -- let's write a story about buying an old car.

The main character buys an old car and... immediately crashes it. What a day! Life is meaningless.

Okay.