

Clean

by Tawnysha Greene

On Sundays, after we go to church, Daddy lets me help him wash the van in the driveway, soap sponges in buckets, slather them on the hood, the doors, the windows. He cleans the roof, the areas I can't reach, and shows me how to press my thumb against the water stream on the hose, to make the water spray. It's hot outside and he tells me to wash the soap away, to hurry before it dries, makes marks on the windows.

After the van is clean, the driveway shiny and wet, Daddy gets the tubes that hold the smooth towels he calls shams, pulls out one for him and one for me. He shows me how lift the windshield wipers up, clean under them, put them down and I follow him around, watch him slap the sham over the van, pull it away, slap again. I do the same, stop every few minutes like Daddy does, hold it out, twist, wring the sham clean.

On Easter Sunday, Daddy waxes the car with a machine and I scrub the wheels with a toothbrush, make the rims shine. We go over the seats with the big vacuum that rolls, wipe the cup holders, the seatbelts, the door handles with baby wipes until they are frothy, smell good and clean. When we're done, we take Momma, sister to the drive-in, get ice cream sundaes, and on the way home, stop at the store to get more soap, more car things for Daddy. Daddy finds the big book in the aisle, the one hanging from a chain, shows me how to find things, by model, make and year. We get oil filters, spark plugs, air fresheners that hang from the mirror, and when Momma stays home, says she's too tired, Daddy always buys more.

One night, we fill the basket full of floor mats, seat covers, high beam lights, and when we stand in line, Daddy adds more to the cart, bottles of Mountain Dew, a flashlight, another pack of flares, just in case. When we scan everything through, Daddy tries to pay with the cards in his wallet, but the machine blinks and Daddy gets mad, says we have to leave, that it costs too much. We leave the store, leave the cart full, and on the drive home, Daddy throws his

wallet against the windshield, takes the trash from the sundaes, the napkins, the spoons, throws them, too, and they bounce off the windows, the seats, chocolate, whipped cream spilling on everything. When we get home, no one says anything. We get out of the van, lock the doors, leave the mess behind.

