

SALVATION by Avery Caswell

EXCERPT

Luther was Mother Franklin's driver. At least that's how he thought of himself. He spent a lot of time waiting around on her; her being so big and all meant she was a slow mover. He'd stand for what seemed like hours waiting for the old woman in one churchyard or another. This time of year, when the grass was brown and crackly and clover was the only thing showing green on the ground, he would kick at it with his shoe, grinding the clover until it disappeared in the red dirt.

That's what that fat old woman was doing to him. Grinding him down. It wasn't like she was really paying him. He was just part of her—what'd she call it?—retinue. My driver. A plate for my driver, she'd demand and the church ladies always did provide. It wasn't begging. But it was charity. What he'd like was a little cash in his pocket. Even when they pulled into a filling station she'd get the bills out of her black square of a pocketbook and not let go of them 'til he was done pumping. Two dollars, she'd bawl in her wheezy old voice, and not a drop more!

Even though technically the station wagon wasn't his, Luther watched over it like a jealous lover, noticing every little hint of trespass—fingerprints on the windows, mud on the floor, crumbs. He kept a little whisk broom under the driver's seat and a red rag, worn soft, that he folded in half and then in thirds and tucked up under the visor. Every time they stopped for gas, he swept the floorboard on the driver side and wiped down the dash. When Mother Franklin was doing her business, he'd whisk her side of the car as well.

He was sure this dust-covered, paneled wagon would do better if they just filled it up to the top of the tank every once and again. He wasn't anything more than a shade tree mechanic but he knew where to poke around under the hood and it was looking like there were going to be some serious problems soon enough.