

# ENGINE OIL

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OPEN BOOK UNBOUND WRITING

She knew from looking at the back of his neck that he smelt of oil, that his shoulders ached from manual work, that the fabric of his shirt would be stiff with a mix of grease and sweat. For a moment Beth closed her eyes imagined opening those buttons one by one, imagined absorbing his heat, his rough, filthy fingers on her skin, inhaling that most delicious smell and drowning in his abdominal muscles.

Beth opened her eyes and her heart dropped to the floor of the bus, he had turned, and she was caught in two dark eyes. He was saying something, but she was so deep in her daydreams she couldn't hear. A woman across the aisle lifted her arm to ring the bell and Beth floundered to the surface. "I'm sorry" she said, her voice sounding rather too loud in her head, "I didn't catch what you said."

"Are you alright?" He tried again. "Only you were - you seemed to be sniffing and you seem - well a bit - well, are you alright?" he repeated, not knowing quite how to word her strange behaviour. "Oh, I'm sorry" she replied with an embarrassed frown. "It was the smell! Oh God! I don't mean - you don't smell bad, it's just..." and then desperate not to lose his attention by offending him anymore, she asked, "What have you been fixing?"

Either side of Dan's mouth pulled down in an exaggerated grimace. "I've been fixing my car, it's a..." He could have said it was a four-wheel drive donkey for all she knew about makes of car, but it didn't matter anyway, she just enjoyed watching his body animate as he talked, he was obviously passionate about motors. Oh, she wished she could die right now and come back as a car engine just to have him talk about her like that! It may have been the cloudy look in her eye but something outside the bus caught his attention and he recognised his stop. That was it, he was gone, no phone number just a lingering smell of engine oil.

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Beth boarded the bus; she had been fixing her own car and needed to pick up a part. She ignored the disapproving glare of the old woman across the aisle. In the last three years she'd grown accustomed to the different reactions of people looking at her in her overalls. Beth never minded the grime on her face, and she certainly didn't notice the oily smell these days. Settling back on the seat she raised a greasy hand to massage her stiff shoulders. She reflected that although it was tough on the neck leaning over an engine it was good for the soul. Her parents had been glad that she had finally made a career decision but were sceptical about her choice. Beth knew her parents thought she was a bit of a dreamer but she'd proved them wrong on this one. Now she was nearly a fully qualified mechanic. A movement behind her halted Beth's thoughts, someone was breathing - no, INHALING at her neck! She tried to keep a look of outrage as she turned but was caught in the two oily pools of his eyes, this time she was ready, this time she was listening.

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