

make and model

red pre-booked taxis only saloon
white taxi
white sports
silver estate
almost every other car is a taxi today
black saloon
maroon range rover
two buses cross one another, both double deckers
red saloon stops still in traffic, back window opens
and fills with the serious face of a small boy. Holding
his hand up to the space where the glass should be
the boy fans it under the fat raindrops while looking
intently at water pooling in a manhole cover
from this vantage point, it is hard to hook anyone
straight in the eye
man in grey tracksuit and black baseball cap,
hurrying
i'm too far away to judge the weave of their shirt, or
to catch what they're mumbling under their breath
man running awkwardly carrying four full plastic
bags, black puffer hood pulled up
people pass under me in a dark line that contracts
and expands, bends and straightens
everyone is trying to get somewhere
man in bus takes his glasses off, rubs them, and
places them back on his nose
even if that somewhere is nowhere they want to be,
or can imagine just yet
blue
turquoise (metallic)
taxi
only sometimes does a dog stop and look up at me,
ears pricked, before jogging on ahead of its master.

[pause]

two people, one tall with a long ponytail, one short
in a denim skirt, neither carrying an umbrella. The
taller one grabs the shorter for one last kiss before
they go their separate ways, one crossing at the
lights and the other continuing south towards the
park

from when I was very small my dad taught me
small silver 4x4
to be observant
silver saloon
it was his way of equipping me
black vw
white 4x4
for what was coming.

[pause]

other people's dads taught them how to use a knife
to gut fish,
or
how to fix lengths of bamboo together using only
one kind of knot,
for shelter.
they'd take my friends up into the hills for shooting
practice, or make them
hold their breath for almost too long under water,
until they learnt not to panic.
but my dad
silver hatchback tentatively parking
woman bouncing along with a black wheelie
suitcase
would put me to bed
mongrel on a short lead
with stories of heroes
sieving gems from what they saw
and heard
from windows,
or the edges of crowds.

[pause]

an early lesson came one Sunday.
I was nine, or ten.
we were out driving when suddenly he pulled over
onto a narrow green verge.
I was to stand there and make a note of every car,
colour, make
and model
and he would come back for me when the four
hours were up.

[pause]

as I stood there armed with a clipboard
and pencil
under the heat of an August sun
I could taste the burnt exhaust fumes
and at intervals dodged the projectiles thrown from
car windows
cigarette butts
crisp packets
a twix wrapper
but I knew my dad
had the other end of the line
and that I was safe.

[pause]

dark grey saloon
black hatchback
young woman dodges traffic
man in shorts munches on a supermarket sandwich
woman dressed in black and white and with grey
hair swept over one eye crosses the road to the café
silver taxi
police car with sirens
man in red cap reads something on his phone and
narrowly misses bumping into two teenagers
my mum
woman is eating from a large orange packet
I learnt different things from my mum
man with white hair and a pink shirt pushes a buggy
when she gathered friends in our living room to
discuss 'them'
cyclist
or 'it'
balding man
when 'it' might happen here
to us
woman in green headscarf, animal print dress and
two branded bags of shopping
I would hide behind our pale blue sofa to snag what
I could.
but the talk of adults,
then,
was as cryptic to me as a foreign alphabet
and their gestures
couple in shorts with backpacks
untrustworthy as lines, drawn in the sand.

[pause]

grey saloon
silver taxi
white hatchback
woman with small dog on extendable lead
man coming out of marie curie with small white bag
once, during that time,
couple in black walking quickly
i was carrying a net bag full of oranges
an orange 4x4 with a white roof
and their bright rumbling against my legs
was reassurance.
it is often what people carry
woman in tartan shirt
that intrigues me the most
man walking very slowly hand-in-hand with a small
boy
I never get to see
more plastic bags
just what people think is so important
an open boot
as to miss it when the bag is empty.

[pause]

if I twist a certain way
there's a smoker
I can follow people just a little bit further
and a white van
but they always end up fraying at the edges
and a black 4x4
or fading in a blur
and a cyclist with a large red pack on his back
and my gaze slackens
and a man
walks out of his shop
scratches his crotch
looks up and down the street
then heads back inside.

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