



Tracy Chapman

"Fast Car"

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04/1988

Elektra

Listening to Tracy Chapman's "Fast Car"

Bunkong Tuon

Her voice is of deep longing,
the guitar persistent, a dream deferred,
and I was back on my grandmother's lap,
the five of us crammed in the back
of that maroon Oldsmobile,
my uncle and his friend in front.
My aunt told us of how she watched
her brother's hand shake as
he released the wad of cash
wrapped in rubber bands into the open
hand of the smiling salesman.
They laughed then quietly thought
about the world they left behind.
Two years in America, my uncle was now
driving this used tired car with the big "O"
on its large hood, this tank that reeked
of cigarettes, gasoline, and cheap perfume.
They were happy to have left the brown
dust, sour stench, and hopelessness
of the refugee camp, happy to escape
hunger and bullets, a world gone gray.
I remember sitting with my grandmother,
two aunts, and an older cousin in that backseat,
sweat running down my spine, t-shirt soaked.
The back windows didn't open all the way down.
Cigarette smoke settled in the air like a bad dream,
and Sin Sisamuth crooned from the tape deck
about a village girl he met in the countryside.
In the trunk was two empty coolers
and our fishing poles made of soda cans
and 2-liter bottles wrapped in string.
I was playing with the straps of
my K-mart sneakers, and no one hit me.
The adults stared out the car windows
in silence. I was pulling that Velcro strap
off on, off on, like an old Band-Aid.