The Red Wheelbarrow

so much depends upon

a red wheel barrow

glazed with rain water

beside the white chickens

-William Carlos Williams
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Special thanks to Diana Richey
Lindsay McCune,
And Mr. Murphy.
And to all those who submitted.
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Grandmother’s Hair

Swirls of white clouds like curls in my grandmother’s hair
Each white streak a strand, the sky its blue roots,
The sun is the glowing diamond eye of my grandmother.
I catch a glance of the blue hood, blue as the sky, over my
Blonde hair and think: will my hair ever be as white as the clouds?

-Annie Burgstede

Hawaii, Age Nine

My father stopped the car
in the middle of a four-lane highway,
all around sugar cane fields stood
tall and green, the air
smelling like syrup.
He left the door open and the radio on,
some song with the words

You do what you have to do.

Puppies were running all over the road.
He dragged the dead ones off with a stick
hooked under the jaws
where their throats were slit.
Their small heads hung awkwardly.
His footprints were purple
from the blood.

My father’s girlfriend said

Don’t look honey, don’t look.

The mother ran back and forth
in the cane fields,
her frantic barks like wood crackling.
It was hot, I was curled in the backseat.
I could not breathe from the gruesome heat.
My father went back and forth,
dragging the honey-colored heaps.

When he got into the car
there was blood on his fingers.
We drove away.
He hadn’t even turned off the engine.

-Jennifer Evans
The Road Opens

The road to New Mexico
is paved with gravel
of the things you left behind.

A small town
filled with nothing.
but the roots you've planted
and the seeds
you've scattered around.

You can feel your veins
stretching like umbilical cords over the road
where iguanas scurry, in front of you
to the nest where their eggs lie.

The sun is setting.
The sky looks like fire.
You wonder if your past is burning
along with it.

-Lindsay Greer
Excerpt from Sink or Swim

Rita, Gary and I went over to Henry's on a Friday two weeks later. Graduation was ten days off and I'd skipped my last three classes. Home, bath, read, napped. Rita and Gary had to drag me off the couch, find my shoes for me, and my purse, and then carry me between them to the car. I thought it was hilarious. Panting, winded Rita sulked in the driver's seat for ten minutes after.

"So what does Hank do?" I asked from the back seat, tying my hair with an old cloth.

"Hank?" Gary stared at me.

"Hanky-poo."

He feigned amusement and faced forward. Gary and I have a special relationship. There is deep love there, surely, but the hibernating kind. Comes out during random seasons. Briefly. Goes away again. Forgotten. "He has a job. He goes to school. You know."

I nodded. Leaned back in my seat. "How old is he?"

"Twenty." Gary leaned forward and turned the volume up on the radio. "Body and feet, I stain my sheets I don't even know why." He smacked Rita's hand on the gearshift. "My girlfriend, she's at the end, she is starting to cry."

"Blah, blah, blah." Rita was in a terrible mood.

I took off my seatbelt and stuck my head between the two front seats. "Hi guys."

"Disgusting. Rita, I don't wanna look at her."

Gary rolled his window down and stuck his head out.


Rita pulled into the driveway of an apartment complex. "Laura and Henry are getting married."

"Doo-doo-dooo," I hummed. She parked and I crawled out, clutching my purse in my hands. I sat on the ground, warm from the day's sun, and I leaned on my elbows.

"You know, you guys make me ill," I said as Gary passed the smoke to Rita.

"You're just jealous because you don't have someone like me," Gary said, crawling onto the hood of Rita's car.

"That's it."

Rita exhaled, shaking her head. "No. no. She's waiting for the man of her dreams."

Bargaining

Next time I saw you
your six rosaries hung around your neck
crisscrossing over one another
on top of the white sheets. A white glow
spread from the fluorescent
Lights over your body.
Because you said
you had been splashed with water
by a Franciscan Monk,
the light fixture was an angel,
you had said it was God
working through electric wiring.

You wouldn't interrupt
your chants,
not even for The Late Show.
That morning's oatmeal
lay untouched
and your pills untouched.

The next afternoon,
as the nurses still say,
you jumped up and shouted,
"I will make a pilgrimage!"
Then collapsed into a trance
filled with Promises.
When the doctors
wouldn't let you go to South Africa
to free the donkeys,
you bowed to their feet,
gave them each a rosary,
and said,
"In due time, you will understand."

-Claire Willis
Saving Spirit

There is a bed at the bottom of the lake
where the woman I once was lies.
Fish of apricot orange and grass-stain green stand
patrol, seaweed the color of bleeding
blackberries restrain her wrists.
She is not my childhood,
she is my spirit. I want to dive
to the bottom, will myself
down to her, take one great breath and help
her wriggle free. I have lost her in this world
that sees not what it does, cannot realize
that fish, sharks, and crabs must find a common language.
I tread water on the surface trying
to inhale a breath, enough
to suffice from an atmosphere unable to sustain me.
The fish gnaw at my ankles, pulling me
deeper, submerging my head,
trying to conform me.
Her features reflect the once calm surface,
she waits patiently
for me to succeed. I gasp,
helpless to free my captive self, wondering
if I drown, if I fail or give up, how I could possibly be
any more dead.

-Meredith Kate Marder

"He exists not, dear Rita," I said.
"Sure he does."
"I heard from Sonny the other night," Gary said.
"Uh-huh," I inhaled, looking straight ahead of me. A scratch in the blue-gray paint.
"He asked if you'd won a Pulitzer yet." Rita handed him a cigarette.
"Oh."
"He told me once that when he got back to the states, we'd go on a road trip
together and I could write the first real girl road trip memoir. That it needed to be written, that nobody could write it but me: "You have to understand the road. The idea of going from here to there. The sticky, vinyl feel of the gearshift in your hands. you know? The windows rolled down in summer. You have to, like, crave miles and miles of the same scene, the rhythm that develops, wheels turning, blah, blah. You understand things like that. You understand people's wildness. What, was it Joni Mitchell? The urge for going."
"You mean, did I write the road trip book?" I asked, standing, throwing the cigarette down.
Gary shrugged. "Yeah, I guess."
"Tell him, I haven't. But I will soon. He's gonna miss it."
He nodded, ignorantly. Rita smiled a little and took my hand. "Onward ho."
The three of us walked side by side up the stairs to Henry's apartment.

-Callie Martin
The stillbirth of a white calf
lies nymphlike on the frost-bitten grass,
dark clouds growling from above.

Our fingers lick
across its body
like ten thin cow’s tongues.

My hands stroke my mother’s,
losing their warmth
to cold limbs;

each of her blood cells
a grain of sand
sliding down the hour-glass.

Soon, streams of gasoline
will flood the calf’s amniotic sac.
Someone will light a match
And let the flames embrace its flesh,
splintering skin like a thousand
oscillating bolts of lightening.

-Stine Sell
The Mill-Wheel
(Inspired by a European house sign)

On sleepless nights
her nose presses into my cool center
where bloodshot eyes blend into darkness,
shallow craters on the moon’s surface.

I am a mask that swallows her face.
Scraping up and down my panes
in the night’s hush,
a sallow fingernail outlines Andromeda.

If she sleeps
she dreams of night,
the stars warming her palms,
and me, the cage holding the moon in the sky.

-Virginia Lewis

The Frugal Repast

Cheap whiskey,
and they know
what isn’t filtered out
when you can only pay
six dollars for a bottle.

They too seem
harshly distilled,
eyes sagging
with the type
of weariness
sleep cannot cure.

Hungry
for something more
than simple bread and booze.
Their eyes betray this
weariness,

But they cannot hide
that they are
just enough
in love
to make this
a repast
at all.

-Peter Kuras
River Keeper

I trace the outline of my aunt’s copper skin,
every wrinkle a body of water,
washed up by time.

I remember when she took me to Bliss River,
and helped me onto the aged silver railing
That guarded against falling
Into the green water.

The waves were strong,
And showered our hot skin.

She told me that there were decaying
Objects at the bottom of the river.
Like rusted metal and worn bones,
And that only God knew their descent.

Then.
She set out a green plaid blanket
On dying grass. We ate mangos with bright
Red skin and orange flesh,
Because she liked the way they
Possessed her lips.

I remember how her fingers
Felt, meandering through
My coarse black hair.

She taught me how to find
A spot on the water, and make a wish.
I wished that she could be with me
For as long as the river stretched.

Now.
I revisit Bliss River in a fantasy,
Bismillah

Precious

"And I'm gripped by a charishing so deep
For my own blowing hair, chapped face, and unbuttoned coat that I'm speechless.
I am living. I remember you."

-Marie Howe

They are all around me,
These precious things:
Lakes, ponds, small streams and rivers.

If I could,
I would dance on them all
And let their ripples
Make small tidals between my toes,
Soft and wet,
The way evening sands do
When I walk along the shore.

Lately, I've been thinking
About love,
But it wasn't until I came
To this place
That I found it to be water.

Love is simple like water,
Fluid through my nerves,
Cleansing my bones to a new white
And eventually washing up at my heart.

I remember being young,
I knew nothing then
Of falling in love.
I didn't search for it

where I re-examine her folds of restrained rivers,
and I know that a part of her
is in the water.

-Zimbria Bibb
Taking Flight

She is returning from her brother’s funeral in her home state of Indiana. She is twenty, he is seven. The plane heads west to Arizona, where she attends college. As she looks out the window, she sees the large irrigation circles spread across the farmland of middle America. Suddenly she understands the beauty of flying; the air and the light.

Birds fascinated him. She had given him a bird book for his fifth birthday along with a bird feeder they had hung outside his bedroom window. He could sit for hours, watching the silent flutter of wings, the quick powerful beaks breaking open seeds. Chickadees, goldfinches, grosbeaks, a wary female cardinal. He loved the fat miserly blue jays that stuffed themselves with sunflower seeds, then flew to nearby cedars to feast. In the afternoon, when he was supposed to be napping, he would pull his rocking chair up to the window and watch.

Remembering this, she smiles. It is a smile of lonely longing for a boy she will never see again. She left school suddenly, in the middle of the night, her roommate answering the pleading ring of the telephone. After the phone call, there was only an empty, unquestioning suitcase.

Once, when he was younger, they had found a dead bluebird in their backyard. It had flown into the window and broken its neck. She found him outside, holding open the wing, counting the feathers. 10 primaries, 10 secondaries.

She had clapsed the weightless bird in his hands, stroking its rusty breast, whispering secrets into its invisible ear.

Her parents told her he had tried to fly from the house roof. It was a grey, sunless day and he had wanted to fly the 1200 miles to see her in Arizona; a surprise visit. Phone calls weren’t enough. They went to buy groceries, leaving him in his room, watching the birds. As the car pulled out of the drive, he’d climbed out his bedroom window, onto the roof.

She can imagine him falling, silently, arms spread like featherless wings. Then he is lying still on the pavement. His muscles twitch, as if relaxing into sleep; his body still dreaming of light.

Over Sun City, she tries to count the backyard pools. They are each a different shade of blue; blue winged teal, blue jay, bluebird. Then there’s Phoenix, in the foothills of the White Tanks. The plane circles again and again, waiting for its turn to land.

-Audrey McDonnell

Letter To My Mother: Fall, 1999

Last week, in Connecticut, I visited your parents’ graves, the familiar slope of the hill, the sky gray, the air chill on my face and hands.

I remember how, months after your mother’s death, you fell to the ground on the beach near your parents’ house, your body folding over, as if bent by the wind, and wept; your face against the sand, the gray Atlantic waters curling thick with foam over your back.

Your eyes look green like sea glass, smooth and round from years of being washed against the shore; your hair blended into the beach, your skin became sand, and I was afraid you would disappear.

Since that day in Connecticut I have dreamt of you, at the other end of the earth, and I, on an island, the waters between us lengthening into one endless expanse. Sometimes when I wake up I can’t be sure that you haven’t melted into the sand, becoming a piece of sea glass, the beach, saltwater – returning to the earth.

-Corrina Collins
Your brought the sunshine back with you,  
I saw it in the nightclub,  
that monochromatic blue room,  
smoke rising from the lips of everyone alive.

Your music is like poetry without end—  
but not the kind of poems that I write.  
More like those of a boy I knew,  
someone who made friends with the bottom  
of every liquor bottle he met.  
He’s alright, that kid, and so are you,  
here in the club, telling the room about  
Los Angeles.  
Lights spills from the end of your trumpet,  
skitters across the floor,  
falls into the cracks between the boards,  
loses itself on dirt and trash and rats.

 Afterwards, we drank coffee, and you told me:  
Happiness is like an orange peel,  
or a river that devours the jungle  
with its perfect cool blue teeth.  
Rushing over stones and trees, spreading the gospel of water.  
Your psilocybin smile was bright with truth.  
I have never seen that river.

-Diana Richey
Late Night Diner

When we sit alone
we turn our backs toward the night
we shape our hours
like our fingers
around the white handles
of thick coffee mugs.

The red wood under our elbows
holds the only warm light
in a green black night,
and the sounds of slow food
let us know we are inside
of something solid.

Looking outside I wonder
when the air touches my legs
as we step out
how much cooler it will be.
This door has not opened in two hours,
warm coffee air is all I breathe.

By the time we leave
the city sun will be waking
and we will head back
slowly
to our room and the bed
to sleep through the sunlight.

-Erin O'Neill
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Wynton Marsalis Eats Some Magic Mushrooms
And Then Travels to Southern California

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She set out a green plaid blanket on dying grass. We ate mangos with bright red skin and orange flesh, because she liked the way they possessed her lips.

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The Mill-Wheel
(Inspired by a European house sign)

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her nose presses into my cool center
where bloodshot eyes blend into darkness,
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I am a mask that swallows her face.
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a sallow fingernail outlines Andromeda.

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any more dead.

-Meredith Kate Marder

“He exists not, dear Rita,” I said.
“Sure he does.”
“I heard from Sonny the other night,” Gary said.
“Uh-huh,” I inhaled, looking straight ahead of me. A scratch in the blue-gray paint.
“He asked if you’d won a Pulitzer yet.” Rita handed him a cigarette.
“Oh.”
“He told me once that when he got back to the states, we’d go on a road trip
together and I could write the first real girl road trip memoir. That it needed to be writ-
ten, that nobody could write it but me: “You have to understand the road. The idea of
going from here to there. The sticky, vinyl feel of the gearshift in your hands, you
know? The windows rolled down in summer. You have to, like, crave miles and miles
of the same scene, the rhythm that develops, wheels turning, blah, blah. You understand
things like that. You understand people’s wildness. What, was it Joni Mitchell? The
urge for going.”
“You mean, did I write the road trip book?” I asked, standing, throwing the
cigarette down.
Gary shrugged. “Yeah, I guess.”
“Tell him, I haven’t. But I will soon. He’s gonna miss it.”
He nodded, ignorantly. Rita smiled a little and took my hand. “Onward ho.”
The three of us walked side by side up the stairs to Henry’s apartment.

-Callie Martin
Excerpt from Sink or Swim

Rita, Gary and I went over to Henry's on a Friday two weeks later. Graduation was ten days off and I'd skipped my last three classes. Home, bath, read, napped. Rita and Gary had to drag me off the couch, find my shoes for me, and my purse, and then carry me between them to the car. I thought it was hilarious. Panting, winded Rita sulked in the driver's seat for ten minutes after.

"So what does Hank do?" I asked from the back seat, tying my hair with an old cloth.

"Hank?" Gary stared at me.

"Hanky-poo."

He feigned amusement and faced forward. Gary and I have a special relationship. There is deep love there, surely, but the hibernating kind. Comes out during random seasons. Briefly. Goes away again. Forgotten. "He has a job. He goes to school. You know."

I nodded. Leaned back in my seat. "How old is he?"

"Twenty." Gary leaned forward and turned the volume up on the radio. "Body and feet. I stain my sheets I don't even know why." He smacked Rita's hand on the gear-shift. "My girlfriend, she's at the end, she is starting to cry."

"Blah, blah, blah." Rita was in a terrible mood.

I took off my seatbelt and stuck my head between the two front seats. "Hi guys."

"Disgusting. Rita, I don't wanna look at her." Gary rolled his window down and stuck his head out.

"What does he do, though, Gary? Does he have any ambition? Any sense of responsibility? Direction? Dreams, fears, hopes?" I tugged on his sleeve.

Rita pulled into the driveway of an apartment complex. "Laura and Henry are getting married."

"Do-do-do-dooo," I hummed. She parked and I crawled out, clutching my purse in my hands. I sat on the ground, warm from the day's sun, and I leaned on my elbows.

"You know, you guys make me ill," I said as Gary passed the smoke to Rita. "You're just jealous because you don't have someone like me," Gary said, crawling onto the hood of Rita's car.

"That's it."

Rita exhaled, shaking her head. "No. no. She's waiting for the man of her dreams."

III

Bargaining

Next time I saw you
your six rosaries hung around your neck
crisscrossing over one another
on top of the white sheets. A white glow
spread from the fluorescent
Lights over your body.
Because you said
you had been splashed with water
by a Franciscan Monk,
the light fixture was an angel,
you had said it was God
working through electric wiring.

You wouldn't interrupt
your chants,
not even for The Late Show.
That morning's oatmeal
lay untouched
and your pills untaken.

The next afternoon,
as the nurses still say,
you jumped up and shouted,
"I will make a pilgrimage!"
Then collapsed into a trance
glazed with Promises.
When the doctors
wouldn't let you go to South Africa
to free the donkeys,
you bowed to their feet,
gave them each a rosary,
and said,
"In due time, you will understand."

-Claire Willis
The Road Opens

The road to New Mexico
is paved with gravel
of the things you left behind.

A small town
filled with nothing,
but the roots you’ve planted
and the seeds
you’ve scattered around.

You can feel your veins
stretching like umbilical cords over the road
where iguanas scurry, in front of you
to the nest where their eggs lie.

The sun is setting.
The sky looks like fire.
You wonder if your past is burning
along with it.

-Lindsay Greer
Grandmother’s Hair

Swirls of white clouds like curls in my grandmother’s hair

Each white streak a strand, the sky its blue roots,

The sun is the glowing diamond eye of my grandmother.

I catch a glance of the blue hood, blue as the sky, over my

Blonde hair and think: will my hair ever be as white as the clouds?

-Annie Burgstede

Hawaii, Age Nine

My father stopped the car
in the middle of a four-lane highway,
all around sugar cane fields stood
tall and green, the air
smelling like syrup.

He left the door open and the radio on,
some song with the words
You do what you have to do.

Puppies were running all over the road.

He dragged the dead ones off with a stick
hooked under the jaws
where their throats were slit.

Their small heads hung awkwardly.

His footprints were purple
from the blood.

My father’s girlfriend said
Don’t look honey, don’t look.

The mother ran back and forth
in the cane fields,
her frantic barks like wood crackling.

It was hot, I was curled in the backseat,
I could not breathe from the gruesome heat.

My father went back and forth,
dragging the honey-colored heaps.

When he got into the car
there was blood on his fingers.

We drove away.

He hadn’t even turned off the engine.

-Jennifer Evans
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The Red Wheelbarrow

so much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow
glazed with rain
water
beside the white
chickens

-William Carlos Williams