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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Artwork

Cover Art: Jenny Kruger
Page 2: Meg Peterson
Page 4: Anna Hochalter
Page 5: David Maddy
Page 8: Earl Stimson
Page 9: Anna Jonsson
Page 19: Shi Ling Wu
Page 21: Michael Gioulakis
Page 22, 23: Dylan Davis

Editors:
Zimbria Bibb
Jaamil Olawale K.
Rachel Ryan

Advisor:
Michael Delp
The Meaning of Words

Christina Wallace

Moon was the first word I learned
that single syllable suspended between
sound and conception,
its lonely vowel resonating
like the understated awe of spectators
left speechless by a masterpiece.

What if I said moon
but intended the little white sprinkles
that adorn my birthday cake?
What if I spoke of sunflowers
as reveries that coerce
my dreams, a scintillating sleep?

What if my words mean something
entirely different from what you have learned?
Would that change anything?
For it is written
"That which we call a rose,
by any other name would smell as sweet."

Come taste the moon,
the garnish of this luscious radiance.
Daydream and allow a sunflower
to unfold in your lap.
Allow yourself an instant to experience
the senses in this distinct vocabulary.
And Her Name Means Angel

Andrea Hambrick

My mother is a woman who thinks herself an empress and when we pull into places like Motel 6 or Super 8 she spends the time sitting in the car smoking overpriced cigars and occasionally muttering Latin words. *Noctilus, noctiluca, nocturnas. Extinguere*. This is not the first drive—it is the first self-discovery, the first exploration, the first detachment from everything I thought I knew so well. My mother’s name is Malaika, meaning angel in Swahili. My name is Papilo, meaning butterfly in Latin.

I am sitting in a hotel room telling her I am an actress all through my body—that it drips through my veins and that I want nothing more than to stand on a wooden stage and have a curtain of red velvet come up to bare my body to the lights. And that I want her in my audience. But she laughs loudly, forcefully and tells me when we get there she might let me try out for a children’s theatre and then she draws the curtains of the window down so that it is dark.

Flying bugs thick as a California fog outside the windows and no air conditioning, we sit in a burning heat across Texas, New Mexico, California. The car smells like wet flannel and Cheezits mixed in with my mother’s nail polish and work uniforms that always smell like gasoline from her old job at the Chevron station. I spend my eleventh July in the back of a 1983 Toyota Tercel.

From my view in the back seat I can see only out the side of the window, things going by in a blur. Below the window, on the plastic inside of the car, I experiment with crayons, marks that will always be there I know by some small intuition. A little girl’s drawing of a mother, frazzled, burnt out, sitting behind a steering wheel. Driving away. Rarely speaking. *Fugitivus anima*.

During the hours in the car I spend my time remembering nights she would read me Shakespeare for bedtime stories. *I have remembered when I loved Peter Rabbit and combing my hair for the simple reason that I could. I remember having loved softball and dancing to the voice of Ani DiFranco. I remember strutting down the halls of school thinking I was the coolest thing just because I connected back pocket with front by a chain that gleamed silver against the blue of my jeans.*

On the seat next to me are boxes and an old Tandy computer, clothes, a lamp, a Yamaha keyboard sticking out of the back. Tonight we will take everything out of the car and pile it in our hotel room onto one of the beds. My mother will pour over dusty maps dug out from the glove compartment and write in her diary of the times she re-
members with her best friend—lying beneath her bed, teaching themselves breathing techniques out of a Yoga manual or picking apples until the wind blew their hair stiff and haphazard as tree branches. The hotels we stay in smell of old but lingering cigar smoke, dusky dreams and travel. In the mornings, she pushes my shoulders back and forth until I open my eyes and then pulls her brown hair into a crown braid that wraps around her head like a halo and I know she is beautiful and she wears used combat boots and ripped camouflage pants from the seventh grade and a pink sweatshirt her mother embroidered for her that says Malaika in cursive gold lettering.

I am sitting in the car again even though it isn’t running and I could get out, walk around, breathe in real air until the drive continues. I have the windows rolled up as if in habit and am looking out the window at the parking lot of an ice rink. My mother is across the street at a service station arguing about the price of spark plugs. I’m biting the end of a blue pen, looking over at the crayon marks on the wall. My diary is in front of me. I can see her taking down maps from the walls, comparing different roads, which places to be taught by, which places will be more memorable. I remember a dream I once had about Juliet and I almost forgot it wasn’t real, I write. She comes back to the car and slowly steps in, slams the door behind her.

"Where now?"
"Dunno."

She pulls out of the parking space and looks down the street both out. She drives until she finds a parking place and turns off the engine.
It's the day of the Christmas mass, and conglomerations of families, mothers and fathers and illegitimate sons, all gathered in the pews, making the air hot, forcing us to sit in the back with the old women, their hands circumventing rosary, calling our names. The Irish-Catholics are here, and the Polish-Catholics, they sit on different sides of the room, each forcing a tradition down quicker than communion wine, and some Yugoslav sitting behind me keeps repeating saints... “Saint Anthony, Saint Augustine” and I begin to sing, “Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California” because I'm five years old, because I'm five years old and don't know any goddamn better than to pull repetition like a rabbit from a hat. The Altar is adorned, and I'm tired, and itchy, and he's blessing the chalices, what's that bread you're making, Father? Where's your kitchen at? And suddenly then “One Bread, One Body” song we all know so well, Mrs. Lucian starts to play it on her organ, the one who lives with Ernesto and drinks Wave. And for the first time in my life I do it, I follow the crowd, and the hallway of people leading up to One Priest, the one with the cross that looks like Gem and I'm up there, and he leans into me like a sore mechanic inspecting a rotten car, declares the “body of Christ,” and I lean in and close my mouth and let my tongue land on a slap from my mother, hurling me out of the row, the wafer never touching my lips but wanting to, subsequently given to Ernesto, who forgives us our trespasses, and I am led by my mother out of the row, in front of the Irish, in front of the Polish, in front of the manic Yugoslav, in front of God, she took out of the row and sat me down on the pew, forcing me to pray, her arms raised to the glory of Heaven, her hands held tight, too furious to touch.
I see my cousin, opalescent-skinned, as if he has been breathing saltwater every minute of his seven-year old life—
his slender tendril arms bent at the elbow, as if floating on saline. His heart expands like a pulsating sea anemone, it unfolds like the shell of a proud oyster, it believes it could swallow a grain of sand and turn it into a gloaming pearl. He walks barefoot with his mother to the edge of the gravel drive, the rocks like crushed shells against his feet. His mother lies, tells him a snake is coiled in the dirt, a giant rattler. He had learned about them in science, those killing machines, with hollow fangs and rattles that look like a long string of crab eyes. He looks and looks and looks, and there is nothing. **Pick up a pinecone, throw it at him**, his mother says. In his palm he holds the cone—a mother dropping pine nuts like small, uncontrollable fish. And I look at his mother’s white face, and I see a mother wanting to delight in her son’s innocence, to delight in delight if her son’s innocence, to delight in his rough determination. And I look at his white face, and I see a child so willing to provoke, so willing to release whatever he grabs. And he throws the cone, and I want to run to him, pinch the color into his checks, remind him of the power he held in his mother’s womb—the power to nudge, the power to thump, the power to pry his way out.

*I have not been the same since my mother died. I was only a few months old. No one explains this to children. I remember a little girl who was often made to feel inferior, who would come to school and cry because the other children called her names. Her mother was always there to comfort her, but the little girl never felt good enough. She began to withdraw into herself, to lose interest in the world around her. I have thought about this often, wondering if I might have been like her. Is it possible to have a mother who died and never be the same again? Is it possible to grow up without a mother? Is it possible to feel inferior even when you have a mother? I do not know. I only know that I have been thinking about these things a lot lately. I have been thinking about my mother and what it means to have a mother and what it means to be a mother.*

**Underestimating the Child**

Drew Krewer

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Everyday in a summer heat intensified by the subway tracks pulsing beneath the city, I walked across campus and rode the elevator to the 7th floor of Pupin. I listened to my professor talk endlessly about vector mathematics, satellite mechanisms, the gravitational constant and its proof in the building where the Manhattan Project first conceived the idea for an atomic bomb.

Boarding the train in Lansing, luggage in hand, alone at fifteen, relieved to be getting out of Michigan thankful for the lack of explanation my mother offered. On the two day trek through the Midwest to Colorado, my name gained a thicker identity than my blood. I had been in love with Holden Caulfield for entirely too long. I recounted what I know, the train on its way to a final destination, reminded me of the drive to Telluride, the road ending in a narrow, deep valley. That’s how everyone arrives, how everyone leaves. There’s no getting lost.

Lauren in Key Largo, surviving a hurricane,
the board where my head was resting. Saying, "No, no, no...it’s like this..." And writing chalk formulas all over my brain. I wondered what they would learn that day, from a wall holding up old couches, a wall that faced high school students learning the basics of physics, starting with force and moving slowly towards relativity.

"Let’s practice for tonight," Keene said, standing up. We were going to Lincoln Center for Salsa night. As we swung our hips, I couldn’t help but feel silly, as if Brian could see right through the chalkboard. But as the steps started to feel right, as my body fell into rhythm with Keene’s and he started to hum, I wondered what Brian might learn from dancing with us, if maybe the Theory of Everything was on this side of the wall.

A prose poem in response to Superstrings and the Search for the Theory of Everything by F. David Peat

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**Origins**

My mother meant
to name me Ingrid,
after the lead actress in Casablanca.
Instead she named me Lauren,
confusing the love
affair of characters,
Rich and Ilsa,
for the marriage
of actors Humphry Bogart
and Lauren Bacall.

Rich and Ilsa
will always have Paris.
They meet again in Morocco,
only Ilsa, she, is with her husband this time.
Still she asks
the piano man to play
the song from Paris.
The way I ask my mother
what my father looked like.
Brushing her fingers
through my hair she reminds me
he is tall,
with blue eyes like mine.

When I was ten
I met my father
for the first time in Telluride,
home to the Film Festival.
I kept my eyes low
reading Catcher in the Rye.
It was easier to get a hold
of the acerbic anti-hero
on the page.

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Lauren Bornschein

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Earl Stimson
The reason I felt a sense of urgency was that my situation was urgent. I was
tired of ducking it, at the lack of irony at high school pep rally, of the radical whole-
someness of our town meetings. I wanted the butterflies of Marquez to fall from the sky.
I wanted some great hand to reach down to our suburban snow globe and shake us up,
smash the glass, set me free. But looking up at the sky I could find no trace of a giant and
serviceable hand of destiny, which meant that I was going to have to figure out some
other route to freedom. 306 — was I even on 306 anymore? — seemed as good a place as
any to start.

A barrage of violins signaled the last son on my tape, Etta James crooning "At
Last". When the phone rang I was sure the Grim Reaper himself would be on the other
end, calling to tell me it had been a near miss. Instead it was my mother’s butterscotch
voice, asking how long I’d be.

"Not long," I shouted over the music. I really had no idea. The phone beeped. I
said goodbye to my mother and clicked onto the other line.

"Where are you?" Chip demanded.

"Guess."

"I can’t," he said.

"Me neither."

Chip sighed.

"I’ll be there soon," I promised. I pressed the off button, laid the phone down
beside me. The last strands of Etta drifted out the window. Outside, the night was dark
and gloriously uncertain, so overrun with clouds it was impossible to tell if I was escaping
anything or heading into the heart of a storm. I took a sip of soda, the hiss of bubbles
audible in the newly settled silence. It was just after six. There were no cars around me
for miles. I was moving very quickly.

Precious Cargo
for my father
Jaime Delp

My father takes the curbs slow, eases up on the accelerator each time we turn. Even on
the long, flat roads in Buckley, and now, just outside of Cadillac, he’s careful with the
speed. He’s got precious cargo, he says, and I watch his eyes check the rear-view mirror.
But I know from the way he coasts through the yellow lights and sings along with the
music, Dylan’s 'Blood On The Tracks,' that he’s aching to turn it up, burn rubber. "I
should have been a racecar driver," he tells me. "I should have raced cars," and Iremem-
ber that night we took the back road home and hit two baby raccoons that were trying to
cross too slowly, the way his foot clung like heat to the brake as we skidded. We pull
into a gas station for coffee, and while my father goes in and I am left alone in the car, I
imagine the way he drives alone on summer nights with the top down, like a boy; pas-
senger seat empty, one stop sign bleeding into another, the center line extending beyond
every imaginable horizon and clump in the road. I, too, know how it is, to ride with the
windows down and the sky just one sharp turn above. And my father knows that the fast
road is just as long. I watch him pass back through the doors and walk towards me as a
sudden north wind lifts his white hair. By the time he returns to the car, he has already
burned miles of road behind him.
The summer of ’89 had been full of long, hot commutes from San Francisco to San Diego. Finally, we finished packing—a day earlier than we had expected—and on October 15th we left for good. We stayed the night in Los Angeles and then drove another hour or so to my grandparent’s house in Encinitas. It was unseasonably hot and balmy on the seventeenth and my dad took me swimming in the pool in the apartment complex. I remember my mom lying in a T-shirt by the pool in one of those plastic reclining chairs, her feet facing us; her belly, swollen in her seventh month of pregnancy, hiding her face. When we came inside in the mid-afternoon, my grandfather was watching game three of the World Series. 60,000 fans were gathered in Candlestick Park that day to see the San Francisco Giants play the Oakland A’s in the Battle of Bay.

In the Bay Area, sports bars were filled with people and the traffic was lighter than usual. At 5:04 PM, for fifteen terrifying seconds, there was a twitches, wrenching trembler that rattled the Bay Area. As my grandmother placed lasagna on a TV tray for my grandfather, and my parents and I played Crazy Eight’s on the coffee table, the World Series became a confused mess of scrambling fans. The 7.1 earthquake caused freeways to crumble, buildings to collapse. Gas mains broke. Fires erupted around San Francisco. The World Series coverage switched to the news station. A frazzled woman in a red suit began giving viewers scattered information about the quake. As the firefighters scrambled around trying to save the injured people and businesses, my parents, grandparents, and I held onto each other. In that evening of heartbreak and relief, the death toll and fires forced us into each other’s arms.

After the earthquake was when things began to fall apart. It took only a year and a half before my parents broke up. Sometimes I think we were supposed to be four of the 68 dead in the earthquake, our happiness preserved forever in that city, in that place where my parents held onto each other, tightly when their lives were threatened. It was a place where we could have died beneath a collapsed freeway and not have left anyone behind.
the number of days left before Christmas, but got lost somewhere between the 13th and the 24th. I hadn’t done any of my shopping yet, but if worse came to worse, I could always give my family presents from the local drugstore: a roll of masking tape, a bottle of vitamin C tablets, silly putty. No, I couldn’t.

Downtown Chagrin was alive with Christmas lights. Chagrin Falls appears most snow globe town-esque in winter. The gazebo in the center was threaded with red and green ribbon, and an enormously ugly Santa had been placed on top. I’d never seen him look so threatening. Beneath the red and blue, snow-covered awning of Another World, a group of white-haired women consulted a map. Outsiders are always getting lost in Chagrin because of our streets. We’re all 10th Avenues and 10th Lines and 10th Streets, and our roads have a tendency to change names right in the middle, with no explanation. I passed the relics of the bakery that had just gone down in flames a few weeks before, just as “Message in A Bottle” began to play. I couldn’t believe that I would never see another dried-cherry brown sugar muffin top. The owners were calling it quits and heading to Skokie, Illinois. Lately there’d been a mass exodus to Skokie. I didn’t know what the big draw was, but then again, I’d never been there; in fact, I hadn’t been much of anywhere, ever.

My station wagon gave me the illusion, though, that I was going places, and alone, sunken deep into the blue cushion seats, I could imagine that I was living. My car was my only porthole to possibilities, to a world away from the cardboard cutout, cinematic perfection of Chagrin Falls. After all, at any moment I could swerve off the road and head for Skokie myself. I could get into an accident. I could pull into a local bar and attempt to pass myself off as Scarlett VanBeezle. I mean, in a car, anything can happen.

I was beyond the town limits by then, past the post office and the “Gap: Coming Soon” signs. I guess we were supposed to be preparing ourselves for this great event, building khaki shrines and whatnot. My parents wanted me to get a job there when it opened in the fall, since my current job at a local bagel chain was a complete disaster. The conditions at Einstein’s were awful: flies in the bagel bins, killer shifts, and wages so low they might as well not have been paying us at all. My boss’s name was Morton Walberg. You could say that ours was a hate-hate relationship. On the surface, there seemed to be a lot of hate. But dig a little deeper, and there was plenty more hate a-waitin’. I was within millimeters of attempting a revolution. I was already starting to hold secret meetings with my co-workers in the custodial closet, whispering among the mops and the Windex. And I smelled of garlic and onions all the time, no matter how hard I scrubbed when I got home.

Before Death

for Frank Zappa

In the gloaming
you might have sat in your chair,
hand small and childlike
folded in your lap,
dreaming of oil paint, of
Billie Holiday or riding ponies
pink and pagan into blazing John Wayne sunsets.
You might have flossed your teeth
three times a day, imagined
bunnies that danced to percussion music
in the grass
outside your house. I suggest,
you must have told your wife,
we name our first born Ahmet,
and after that, Dweezel.
She must have laughed and crowed
and finally agreed
after you settled
that the girl would be called Moon Unit
and you would feed them weed brownies for dessert
each Sunday night after repeat listings
to “War of the Worlds” and then
fly kites like two-dimensional drumheads
across Prussian skies.
You stopped cutting your hair,
let it fly on thousand directions
in the wind, tapping your back like raindrops, you thought,
like raindrops.
Even though it’s not in the papers,
not in books or in interviews,
I think that near your end, near when you were devoured like meat under flies,
When I was twelve, my father threw our goldfish into the neighborhood lake, having decided that it was too much trouble to take care of. How much trouble a goldfish is capable of being is still unclear to me—I needed a lot more than a few handfuls of fish flakes, but my parents never tossed me in a lake. Driving past that same lake one hopelessly February-esque December evening, I found myself thinking of Dorothy. Was she still alive? I imagined her swimming beneath the ice, a small orange sun burning through black water. I hoped that she had found a better life outside the aquarium, in the company of seaweed.

I made a jolting turn onto 306, a road that, like the majority in Chagrin Falls, leads mostly to super malls. When my family moved into town fifteen years ago it was Ye Olde New England plunked in the midst of Ohio farmland, all gingerbread houses and local shops. Then, three years ago, a Starbucks came to town, and we’ve been sliding down the slope of commercialism ever since, only we’re too busy sipping our moccachinos to notice. And here’s the worst part: I like moccachinos. I can’t help it. They taste good. Sometimes I’m so Americana I make myself sick to my stomach.

That night I was heading to Tommy’s to meet Chip McCaslan, a teddy bear of a guy who hated Tommy’s because they served food with names like “Tofurrific Tree Salad”. He’d agreed to meet me there anyway, which is one reason why he’s one of my oldest friends. I left the house at 5:30. Outside the clouds were thin and low, as if they’d been pressed flat by a celestial rolling pin. The snow on the ground was as gray as the sky and the trees: in winter, Ohio’s color scheme is strictly monochromatic. On the seat beside me lay a just-opened bottle of Diet Coke and a stack of books, all the homework I hadn’t done and didn’t plan on doing. Lately I hadn’t been able to bring myself to care about school. After you’ve filled out a certain amount of worksheets, they begin to look the same.

I fumbled around for my mix tape and popped it into the stereo. If I was going to hell, I figured my descent might as well be accompanied by a good soundtrack. A few moments later Rusted Root’s “Send Me On My Way” bounced through the speakers. Tapping my fingers on the steering wheel along with the drums, I accidentally ran a red light for the second time that day. I can’t drive. There’s no way I should ever have been given a license. I can’t even walk straight.

The road was full of cars with Christmas trees bound to the roofs, with the exception of the minivan in front of me toting several Schwinn bikes. I tried to calculate...
you thought about making death your own;
claiming death before it could claim you.
I suppose the thought of owning your own demise must have been beautiful; you imagined yourself flying bloody and clean from the ash heap, the new, Phoenix you, dressed in tree bark with leaves in your hair, eyes blue and melting bluer—perhaps dreaming of Montana, or just remembering without much reassurance from memory itself, the way she smelled in the morning, fresh from the shower, her hands moving over your face, your neck, your hands quivering; the wet, the warmth, the way the ceiling moved in circles in those moments.
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13th and the 24th. I hadn’t done any of my shopping yet, but if worse came to worse, I
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was my only porthole to possibilities, to a world away from the cardboard cutout, cine-
atronic perfection of Chagrin Falls. After all, at any moment I could swerve off the road
and head for Skokie myself. I could get into an accident. I could pull into a local bar and
attempt to pass myself off as Scarlett VanBeezle. I mean, in a car, anything can happen.

I was beyond the town limits by then, past the post office and the “Gap: Com-
ing Soon” signs. I guess we were supposed to be preparing ourselves for this great event,
building khaki shrines and whatnot. My parents wanted me to get a job there when it
opened in the fall, since my current job at a local bagel chain was a complete disaster.
The conditions at Einstein’s were awful: flies in the bagel bins, killer shifts, and wages so
low they might as well not have been paying us at all. My boss’s name was Morton Wal-
berg. You could say that ours was a hate-hate relationship. On the surface, there seemed
to be a lot of hate. But dig a little deeper, and there was plenty more hate a-waitin’. I
was within millimeters of attempting a revolution. I was already starting to hold secret
meetings with my co-workers in the custodial closet, whispering among the mops and the
Windex. And I smelled of garlic and onions all the time, no matter how hard I scrubbed
when I got home.

Before Death
for Frank Zappa

In the gloaming
you might have sat in your chair,
hand small and childlike
folded in your lap,
dreaming of oil paint, of
Billie Holiday or riding ponies
pink and pagan into blazing John Wayne sunsets.
You might have flossed your teeth
three times a day, imagined
bunnies that danced to percussion music
in the grass
outside your house. I suggest,
you must have told your wife,
we name our first born Ahmet,
and after that, Dweezel. She must have laughed and crowed
and finally agreed
after you settled
that the girl would be called Moon Unit
and you would feed them weed brownies for dessert
each Sunday night after repeat listenings
to “War of the Worlds” and then
fly kites like two-dimensional drumheads
across Prussian skies.
You stopped cutting your hair,
let it fly on thousand directions
in the wind, tapping your back like raindrops, you thought,
like raindrops.
Even though it’s not in the papers,
not in books or in interviews,
I think that near your end, near when you
were devoured like meat under flies,
Loma Prieta Earthquake

The summer of '89 had been full of long, hot commutes from San Francisco to San Diego. Finally, we finished packing—a day earlier than we had expected—and on October 15th we left for good. We stayed the night in Los Angeles and then drove another hour or so to my grandparent’s house in Encinitas. It was unseasonably hot and balmy on the seventeenth and my dad took me swimming in the pool in the apartment complex. I remember my mom lying in a T-shirt by the pool in one of those plastic reclining chairs, her feet facing us; her belly, swollen in her seventh month of pregnancy, hiding her face. When we came inside in the mid-afternoon, my grandfather was watching game three of the World Series. 60,000 fans were gathered in Candlestick Park that day to see the San Francisco Giants play the Oakland A’s in the Battle of Bay.

In the Bay Area, sports bars were filled with people and the traffic was lighter than usual. At 5:04 PM, for fifteen terrifying seconds, there was a twitching, wrenching trembler that rattled the Bay Area. As my grandmother placed lasagna on a TV tray for my grandfather, and my parents and I played Crazy Eight’s on the coffee table, the World Series became a confused mess of scrambling fans. The 7.1 earthquake caused freeways to crumble, buildings to collapse. Gas mains broke. Fires erupted around San Francisco. The World Series coverage switched to the news station. A frazzled woman in a red suit began giving viewers scattered information about the quake. As the firefighters scrambled around trying to save the injured people and businesses, my parents, grandparents, and I held onto each other. In that evening of heartbreak and relief, the death toll and fires forced us into each other’s arms.

After the earthquake was when things began to fall apart. It took only a year and a half before my parents broke up. Sometimes I think we were supposed to be four of the 68 dead in the earthquake, our happiness preserved forever in that city, in that place where my parents held onto each other, tightly when their lives were threatened. It was a place where we could have died beneath a collapsed freeway and not have left anyone behind.

Suddenly, I realized that I didn’t know where I was. I’d been so absorbed in planning a mutiny that I’d turned left where the road branched instead of right. In the night, everything looked unfamiliar; I wasn’t used to paying attention while I drove yet. In the passenger seat, I was almost always reading or asleep, and there was no need to watch for signs and sudden turns. I could make out a McDonald’s sign in the distance, but that didn’t help me very much. I wasn’t all that disturbed, though. I was kind of glad. Not knowing where I was going counted as some kind of adventure. And I was desperate for something to happen. It didn’t even have to be good: I might flunk out of Algebra II, for example, (which seemed very much in the realm of possibility), or discover a new color, or even just roll down a dark and silent road somewhere in the general direction of Lake Erie.

My parents had pointed to hormones as the source of my impatience, and Chip had chalked it up to small-town fever. “Of course you’re bored,” he’d said. “Do you know what our weekend options are? Fast food, football, and cow-tipping. Chagrin is severely in need of CPR.” But it wasn’t Chagrin. I was in need of CPR, and I could feel my heartbeat fading fast. The night before I had tried to write a poem, but after an hour the only thin written in my notebook were the words, I NEED A WAY OUT. Then I’d underlined it a couple times. Then I drew a box around it. Finally I sketched a flower in the margin, to dispel the urgency, muffle my own frustrated screams. I felt guilty for my dissatisfaction with what I had when the contents of my glove compartment revealed that I was a lot luckier than I would ever be able to understand. What did I have to complain about? I should have been kissing the steering wheel, I should have been writing odes to suburban planning, and instead, all I could think of was the intrinsically oppressive nature of our school assemblies.

I still hadn’t made an attempt to find my bearings. Ahead I could see an intersection where I could turn and retrace my tracks. I reached over to lower the window a little and get some air into the car. Suddenly, an enormous truck was pulling out a few feet from my front bumper. I’m talking monster truck here, like a mini-train. I don’t know why they allow things like that on the road with people in crummy centuries-old station wagons, for God’s sake. Trucks should have their own separate highways. I slammed on the breaks and lurched my hand at the horn. The truck-train did not acknowledge our near-collision. It made a slow caterpillar turn, curving around me at a nearly 90 degree angle. I sat very still, breathed, and felt thankful that I was able to do so. By the time I stopped shaking I realized I’d just kept on going, straight ahead, and missed my opportunity. I would double back someplace else. I turned up the volume as far as it went.
The reason I felt a sense of urgency was that my situation was urgent. I was tired of ducking it, at the lack of irony at high school pep rallies, of the radical wholesomeness of our town meetings. I wanted the butterflies of Marquez to fall from the sky. I wanted some great hand to reach down to our suburban snow globe and shake us up, smash the glass, set me free. But looking up at the sky I could find no trace of a giant and serviceable hand of destiny, which meant that I was going to have to figure out some other route to freedom. 306 — was I even on 306 anymore? — seemed as good a place as any to start.

A barrage of violins signaled the last son on my tape, Etta James crooning "At Last". When the phone rang I was sure the Grim Reaper himself would be on the other end, calling to tell me it had been a near miss. Instead it was my mother’s butterscotch voice, asking how long I’d be.

“Not long,” I shouted over the music. I really had no idea. The phone beeped. I said goodbye to my mother and clicked onto the other line.

“Where are you?” Chip demanded.

“Guess.”

“I can’t,” he said.

“Me neither.”

Chip sighed.

“I’ll be there soon,” I promised. I pressed the off button, laid the phone down beside me. The last strands of Etta drifted out the window. Outside, the night was dark and gloriously uncertain, so overrun with clouds it was impossible to tell if I was escaping anything or heading into the heart of a storm. I took a sip of soda, the hiss of bubbles audible in the newly settled silence. It was just after six. There were no cars around me for miles. I was moving very quickly.
the board where my head was resting. Saying, "No, no, no... it's like this..." And writing chalk formulas all over my brain. I wondered what they would learn that day, from a wall holding up old couches, a wall that faced high school students learning the basics of physics, starting with force and moving slowly towards relativity.

"Let's practice for tonight," Keene said, standing up. We were going to Lincoln Center for Salsa night. As we swung our hips, I couldn't help but feel silly, as if Brian could see right through the chalkboard. But as the steps started to feel right, as my body fell into rhythm with Keene's and he started to hum, I wondered what Brian might learn from dancing with us, if maybe the Theory of Everything was on this side of the wall.

**A prose poem in response to Superstrings and the Search for the Theory of Everything by F. David Peat**

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**Origins**

My mother meant
to name me Ingrid,
after the lead actress in Casablanca.
Instead she named me Lauren,
confusing the love
affair of characters,
Rich and Ilsa,
for the marriage
of actors Humphry Bogart
and Lauren Bacall.

Rich and Ilsa
will always have Paris.
They meet again in Morocco,
only Ilsa, she, is with her husband this time.
Still she asks
the piano man to play
the song from Paris.
The way I ask my mother
what my father looked like.
Brushing her fingers
through my hair she reminds me
he is tall,
with blue eyes like mine.

When I was ten
I met my father
for the first time in Telluride,
home to the Film Festival.
I kept my eyes low
reading Catcher in the Rye.
It was easier to get a hold
of the acerbic anti-hero
on the page
Everyday in a summer heat intensified by the subway tracks pulsing beneath the city, I walked across campus and rode the elevator to the 7th floor of Pupin. I listened to my professor talk endlessly about vector mathematics, satellite mechanisms, the gravitational constant and its proof in the building where the Manhattan Project first conceived the idea for an atomic bomb.

The doors lining the 7th floor hallway were large and oak with the original, ornate door handles and the frosted windows between ceiling and door. Our classroom had lime green carpet, window air-conditioners, green chalkboards, tables and chairs. Sixties-style orange plastic couches lined the back wall. Before class we would sit there, lean our heads back and talk with our eyes closed about what we were going to do that night.

We were already three weeks into the class when Keene whispered to me as we walked down the hall to our lecture room, “You know whose office that is?” He nodded to the door just before ours. “Brian Greene,” he whispered, his eyes wide. “You know—superstring guy, Elegant Universe—he’s searching for the Theory of Everything in there.”

The next day the office door was open and inside were four men arguing at a blackboard. There were black and white tiles on the floor; I’ve seen walk-in closets larger than that office. But the blackboard held symbols I had never seen, numbers to scare the best of us, the whole surface white with formulas and arrows and chalk dust. The men—one of them was Brian—were young, clean, adorned in glasses and penny-loafers, but minus pocket protectors, and they were arguing, a tall blond in his early thirties slamming his hand against the board where a number was circled, trying desperately, it seemed, to defend his answer.

I paused outside their door until the blond made eye contact with me and then continued on to mine. I went into the classroom, where I found the lights out and Keene lounging on the sofa. I sat down next to him, leaning my head against the wall shared with that blackboard.

I imagined Brian standing up, a shock of curly brown hair, reaching down to the area of

Dancing in Pupin  

Meredith Marder

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Underestimating the Child  
Drew Krewer

I see my cousin, opalescent-skinned, as if he has been breathing saltwater every minute of his seven-year old life—
his slender tendril arms bent at the elbow,
as if floating on saline. His heart expands
like a pulsating sea anemone, it unfolds
like the shell of a proud oyster, it believes
it could swallow a grain of sand
and turn it into a gloaming pearl. He walks barefoot
with his mother to the edge of the gravel drive,
the rocks like crushed shells
against his feet. His mother lies, tells him a snake
is coiled in the dirt, a giant rattler. He had learned
about them in science, those killing machines, with hollow fangs
and rattles that look like a long string of crab eyes.
He looks and looks and looks, and there is
nothing. Pick up a pinecone, throw it at him, his mother says.
In his palm he holds the cone—a mother dropping pine nuts
like small, uncontrollable fish. And I look
at his mother’s white face, and I see a mother wanting
to delight in her son’s innocence, to delight
in delight if her son’s innocence, to delight
in his rough determination. And I look
at his white face, and I see a child so willing to provoke, so willing
to release whatever he grabs.
And he throws the cone, and I want to run to him,
pinch the color into his cheeks, remind him of the power
he held in his mother’s womb—
the power to nudge,
the power to thump,
the power to pry his way out.

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surrounded by mobsters,
a young, independent woman
saving the day
not needing any man to love her.
Or is it Ilia in Casablanca,
the intended identity
I was drawn from,
with a wading heart,
between two things:
the ideals I have
and the love I want.
It's the day of the Christmas mass, and conglomerations of families, mothers and fathers and illegitimate sons, all gathered in the pews, making the air hot, forcing us to sit in the back with the old women, their hands circumventing rosary, calling our names. The Irish-Catholics are here, and the Polish-Catholics, they sit on different sides of the room, each forcing a tradition down quicker than communion wine, and some Yugoslav sitting behind me keeps repeating saints... "Saint Anthony, Saint Augustine" and I begin to sing, "Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California" because I'm five years old, because I'm five years old and don't know any goddamn better than to pull repetition like a rabbit from a hat. The Altar is adorned, and I'm tired, and itchy, and he's blessing the chalices, what's that bread you're making, Father? Where's your kitchen at? And suddenly then "One Bread, One Body" song we all know so well, Mrs. Lucian starts to play it on her organ, the one who lives with Ernesto and drinks Wave.

And for the first time in my life I do it, I follow the crowd, and the hallway of people leading up to One Priest, the one with the cross that looks like Gem and I'm up there, and he leans into me like a sore mechanic inspecting a rotten car, declares the "body of Christ," and I lean in and close my mouth and let my tongue land on a slap from my mother, hurling me out of the row, the wafer never touching my lips but wanting to, subsequently given to Ernesto, who forgives us our trespasses, and I am led by my mother out of the row, in front of the Irish, in front of the Polish, in front of the manic Yugoslav, in front of God, she took out of the row and sat me down on the pew, forcing me to pray, her arms raised to the glory of Heaven, her hands held tight, too furious to touch.
members with her best friend—lying beneath her bed, teaching themselves breathing techniques out of a Yoga manual or picking apples until the wind blew their hair stiff and haphazard as tree branches. The hotels we stay in smell of old but lingering cigar smoke, dusky dreams and travel. In the mornings, she pushes my shoulders back and forth until I open my eyes and then pulls her brown hair into a crown braid that wraps around her head like a halo and I know she is beautiful and she wears used combat boots and ripped camouflage pants from the seventh grade and a pink sweatshirt her mother embroidered for her that says Malaika in cursive gold lettering.

I am sitting in the car again even though it isn’t running and I could get out, walk around, breathe in real air until the drive continues. I have the windows rolled up as if in habit and am looking out the window at the parking lot of an ice rink. My mother is across the street at a service station arguing about the price of spark plugs. I’m biting the end of a blue pen, looking over at the crayon marks on the wall. My diary is in front of me. I can see her taking down maps from the walls, comparing different roads, which places to be taught by, which places will be more memorable. I remember a dream I once had about Juliet and I almost forgot it wasn’t real, I write. She comes back to the car and slowly steps in, slams the door behind her.

"Where now?"
"Dunno." She pulls out of the parking space and looks down the street both...
And Her Name Means Angel
Andrea Hambrick

My mother is a woman who thinks herself an empress and when we pull into places like Motel 6 or Super 8 she spends the time sitting in the car smoking overpriced cigars and occasionally muttering Latin words. Noctilus, noctiluca, nocturnas. Extinguere. This is not the first drive—it is the first self-discovery, the first exploration, the first detachment from everything I thought I knew so well. My mother’s name is Malaika, meaning angel in Swahili. My name is Papilo, meaning butterfly in Latin.

I am sitting in a hotel room telling her I am an actress all through my body—that it drips through my veins and that I want nothing more than to stand on a wooden stage and have a curtain of red velvet come up to bare my body to the lights. And that I want her in my audience. But she laughs loudly, forcefully and tells me when we get there she might let me tryout for a children’s theatre and then she draws the curtains of the window down so that it is dark.

Flying bugs thick as a California fog outside the windows and no air conditioning, we sit in a burning heat across Texas, New Mexico, California. The car smells like wet flannel and Cheezits mixed in with my mother’s nail polish and work uniforms that always smell like gasoline from her old job at the Chevron station. I spend my eleventh July in the back of a 1983 Toyota Turrell.

From my view in the back seat I can see only out the side of the window, things going by in a blur. Below the window, on the plastic inside of the car, I experiment with crayons, marks that will always be there I know by some small intuition. A little girl’s drawing of a mother, frazzled, burnt out, sitting behind a steering wheel. Driving away. Rarely speaking. Fugitivus anima.

During the hours in the car I spend my time remembering nights she would read me Shakespeare for bedtime stories. I have remembered when I loved Peter Rabbit and combing my hair for the simple reason that I could. I remember having loved softball and dancing to the voice of Ani Difranco. I remember strutting down the halls of school thinking I was the coolest thing just because I connected back pocket with front by a chain that gleamed silver against the blue of my jeans.

On the seat next to me are boxes and an old Tandy computer, clothes, a lamp, a Yamaha keyboard sticking out of the back. Tonight we will take everything out of the car and pile it in our hotel room onto one of the beds. My mother will pour over dusty maps dug out from the glove compartment and write in her diary of the times she re-
Moon was the first word I learned
that single syllable suspended between
sound and conception,
its lonely vowel resonating
like the understated awe of spectators
left speechless by a masterpiece.

What if I said moon
but intended the little white sprinkles
that adorn my birthday cake?
What if I spoke of sunflowers
as reveries that coerce
my dreams, a scintillating sleep?

What if my words mean something
entirely different from what you have learned?
Would that change anything?
For it is written
"That which we call a rose,
by any other name would smell as sweet."

Come taste the moon,
the garnish of this luscious radiance.
Daydream and allow a sunflower
to unfold in your lap.
Allow yourself an instant to experience
the senses in this distinct vocabulary.
The Red Wheelbarrow
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Artwork
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Photograph by Heidi Johnson
Artwork: (L to R) Dylan Davis, Alice Yeh, Ali Vanzorn, and Anna Hochalter

Editors:
Zimbria Bibb
Jaamil Olawale K.
Rachel Ryan

Advisor:
Michael Delp
Photograph by Michael Gioulakis
The Red Wheelbarrow

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