

Car

by Pia Ehrhardt

My father brought home a turquoise Porsche with red leather upholstery. My sister and I were small, eight and six, and fit tightly in the jumpseats behind my parents.

We went for a ride, toiled around Rome, circled the Colosseum, showing off for the people looking. My father made us listen to him double-clutch because he said that this was good for the car. The sound of this felt like a struggle for the engine, a hesitation, and then the car sped on.

We'd parked along the Via Veneto, the car within eyeshot so my father and mother could admire it at the curb. My sister and I ordered gelati and my parents had coffees spiked with grappa. Everything alcoholic in Italy tasted like licorice.

We lived in an apartment building with a steep driveway, and the car stalled half a block from home. My father made us get out, and he pushed it, one hand on the steering wheel, the other on the open door. When he got to the top of the driveway he thought he would push it and then jump in, coast to the bottom, and park it in the underground garage, but when he pushed the Porsche the car took off. He tried to hang on but it was heavy. The car dragged him and his shoes skidded along the driveway and my mother and sister and I watched in shock. I remember thinking then: You can't hold back a moving car.

The car went down the incline and over a wall and it fell two stories below onto a street that was usually filled with children. It fell obscenely with the bottom up, like a girl on her back with no underwear.

People came running from everywhere, and my father walked down, calmly, to look over the wall. No one was killed, but the car had flattened and my sister and I watched the tow truck pick it up, turn it over, and bring it away. The pretty blue paint had scraped away and the car was smashed up and gray.

My father never spoke about this and my mother didn't either until they'd divorced and we were on her patio having a glass of wine. She admitted he'd been drinking, but that's all. Not that he had a trip-up on common sense, shit logic: man, car, incline, fast, crash, death that escaped him that night, and for the next thirty years I was on the lookout for the other things he might do.

