**Liberum Volare**

Cynthia Belmont

Robin’s egg blue, Latin name evoking flight, our 1976 Plymouth Volare station wagon was majestic, every finish inside it also bright blue, the seats slick and puffy, supple as seals. Parked out front on our decorous street, it glowed defiantly, aquamarine gem-cheap like high school sweetheart jewelry. When our parents repainted it white, a nice neutral color, my sister and I taped red construction paper ambulance crosses on the doors. When it rusted, they painted it again: brown for camouflage.

Our cars were always like this, disasters. We did have one new Peugeot, in the shop for repairs so we borrowed a forest green Jaguar coupe from neighbors who had three Jaguars because the father was a collector, also with a room-sized train set of his own in their basement, off-limits to children.

I loved the Jaguar, so fancy. Lolling in the back like a sultana, I decided to touch the creamy plush ceiling to see if it was as soft as it looked. I extended my pointer finger and pushed gently. It left a small dent. My sister stared back at me solemnly. The foam or whatever it was did not regain its shape, pristine rich car material ruined forever at the hint of human contact. We never told. When we returned the Jaguar, I bore a fingertip-sized pockmark of shame.

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There were no seatbelt laws then, so we didn’t wear them. The Volare was our road trip stretch limo. In the front, conclusions were drawn, air temperature dictated, gum and grapes dispensed, cigarettes smoked, dozens and dozens from state to state as we trundled four days westward from Kansas to California at 55 mph, smoke streaming out the cracked window into the Colorado wind. 55 because Nixon made the whole country drive slowly to conserve oil, this was in the days when national measures were taken, the Clean Air Act, the Environmental Decade. Today they make you wear helmets and seatbelts, no smoking within 25 feet of the building but never mind what carcinogens are floating around in everything, the food, the air, the water, the benzene in your couch, your workout clothes made of warm sweaty plastic leaching BPA into your chest, stay focused on what you can control.

I learned from watching the front that while the driver has the power of conveyance, which is ultimately the power to decide, the front passenger has other, lesser forms of power, wife forms, the power of silence, the power to withhold.

The back seat was where we sat properly and I read Erma Bombeck to everyone, The Grass is Always Greener Over the Septic Tank, If Life is a Bowl of Cherries, What Am I Doing in the Pits?, I Lost Everything in the Post-natal Depression, all of us laughing hysterically at 1970s suburban housewife troubles, tongue-in-cheek but really was she not actually miserable or rather were women not actually miserable, this question lingered.

Sometimes we fought, our father’s mood ring eyes clear lake then glacial in the rearview mirror, his right arm whipping back. If he missed whoever’s leg, we instantly reunited in silent hilarity, if he made the mark it was desperate pain and just desserts when it wasn’t you. The back seat was where to get what you wanted from up front—attention, answers, food.

The rug-lined way back commanded half the length of the car, the way back was our blue palace, blue genie bottle where we lounged among pillows, stuffed animals, flower-patterned shopping bags full of activities our mother bought specially for the trip. Fuzzy Felt, invisible coloring pens that revealed the pictures, Magna Doodle, Mad Libs, fat books of fresh stickers about space or down on the farm or the zoo, the license plate game, car bingo. Napping, whispering, singing, practicing accents, making up stories about people we saw in other cars, our feet rhythmically colliding, gazing out the extra-wide windows at more corn, cow profiles, scrub stretches, the occasional wild flap of tarp loosening from the luggage bundle on the roof, horizontal rain, distant buttes, white shimmers of mirage, closer, closer, we could smell the ocean, it was Nevada. It was hot in the afternoon sun back there but also air conditioner-cold. It was a two girl-sized coop and free range. Slow yet fast, like summer.