

Rebecca McClanahan

My Father's Cadillac

While other men flipped
through *Playboy*, their eyes
centered on the creased beauties,
my father fingered the slick
pages of new-car catalogs, stood outside
the transparent walls of showrooms
as the objects of his desire spun
on the turntable decade after decade,
cars he kept denying himself
for the line of boxy sedans
and station wagons solid enough
to hold six children who soon dispersed
to the convoy of used bugs and beetles
filling our driveway like an army
of hard-shelled insects, each haggled
at a discount from some widow or retiree,
each housing in its driver's seat
a teenager whose only desire was to peel
away, a father's love
bright as headlights in our eyes.
It took thirty years and the slicing
of his chest, a plastic valve
set like an odometer to empty itself
after five years, tops,
for my father to finally say yes
to this Cadillac where we sink
into blue leather. The control panel
beams Good Morning, All Systems Go.
Enjoy your inheritance, my father says.
You're riding in it. We laugh
about the man who was buried in his car.

My father asks if I remember
the photograph of his father standing
before that '57 Chevy — his last car, his last
trip out west. All I recall is a big white
house of a car framing a man bent with age
and emphysema, his eyes squinting
against the California sun. The climate
in the Cadillac is a year-round seventy.
We could be anywhere, we could be
in the air, sailing, or coasting
on a blue ship toward some white-sand
miracle, like this place we've arrived
years after the warranty on my father
has run out. *Ninety-six thousand miles*
on this baby, he says, caressing the padded
dashboard. The cruise control is set,
the spring-loaded coils beneath us poised
to absorb shock from within or without.
Ninety-six thousand miles, and still she shines.