

RACHEL SQUIRES BLOOM

RUTABAGA

Driving to church one post-Vatican II Saturday, I look at Deb and splutter, *ru-ta-ba-ga*. She instantly replies, *ru-ta-ba-ga*. Our eyes lock as tightly as our seatbelts across the wide bench seat of the Plymouth Fury. I echo her echo, syllables gaining momentum, consuming us with hilarity and racket. Despite tight seatbelts, we fall toward one another like praying hands, a toppled steeple, managing between laugh-breaths to repeat:

ru-ta-ba-ga. We don't hear *shush*, *quiet*, *shut the hell up*, until Dad veers the ark of a car wildly, left hand on the wheel, right wrenching behind his oh-my-bad-back to smack at us yelling, *If I have to pull over . . .* Deb and I are deaf to all but four sounds, an amazing change in meaning as the word is blurted anew, each reassemblance of the multi-syllabic *ru-ta-ba-ga*.

Filterless, my dad bellows, *why do I have these stupid kids?* No one knows, or tries to read what Mom thinks, eyes turned toward the window, ringed pink-tipped fingers fondling a Viceroy. She's thinking if the whole goddamn car crashes the kids and I will be scooped up to heaven, the bastard beside me dragged down to where he belongs.

Oblivious to all that, Deb and I discern nothing but the next round of hilarity, the chug and roar of syllables rushing over tongues, let loose beyond our teeth in gasps of joy in language beyond word, beyond meaning.