

Emily A. F. García

## Angel of Roadkill

*Hans Nagel Road, Washougal, Washington, and  
Ridge Road, Lansing, New York*

Most people don't slow down approaching the ravine.  
I prefer not to be going 45 at the blind part of the curve,  
especially at dusk, which comes early and suddenly in January,  
so I am already slowing when I see wings in the road,  
flapping, hovering over the body of a possum,  
taking flight at the last possible moment—  
and then the flash of rusty tail and open talons letting go  
as I pass close enough to see liquid eye, bloody beak.  
The hawk screeches and flies off into the trees.

We are maybe half a mile from home  
but the kids are already settled into their books and music.  
I glance at their peaceful, oblivious faces  
before concentrating again on the ravine, while my mind's eye,  
which I flatter myself is a bird's eye, sees another hawk  
on another road, thousands of miles and days away.

On that road there was a flutter of wings and a thump  
against the grille of my mother's car. I asked her to stop  
and walked back to the dying bird in the midday sun,  
the hypnotic cicada hum broken only by my footfalls  
in the gravel and the feeble flapping of a single wing.  
I knelt, prayed, and ended her pain. Now I carry a knife.  
All I had that day were my shaking hands.

I was barely an adult but felt older than my mother,  
who said nothing as I carried the body back to the car  
and laid her gently on the floor at my feet. I buried her  
near the water, far away from the treacherous road.  
How do they see the roads? As great game trails  
that sometimes expose scurrying prey  
or yield up an easy but dangerous morsel?

Maybe five seconds have passed. I am driving toward town  
with two kids in the car. I don't stop—the possum  
is already past pain. Next morning I will regret the lapse,  
walk grimly down the hill, shovel in hand,  
find two bodies in the road: one furred, one feathered.