

Roadkill Mother's Day

Macy Douglas

I drive home from work. The same path I've taken for five years.
The road too narrow for all these people and their thoughts. The
leaves are a heavy blanket chasing us home from the jobs we try to
leave behind.

Nearing the house, I see a lump in the road. I feel the lump in my
throat forming, knotting. I know what's coming. I want to look away
but can't.

I stare at the plump body, striped tail, and unmoving black fur. I am
grateful most of the damage hides from my delicate mind.
Just a prone form, blood pasting it to the pavement like shapes on
construction paper. Nothing where it's supposed to be,
"Look, mommy!"
Still, a mother praises the beauty in the disfigured thing received.

I hope it went fast, painless. I hope it died without knowing.
How scary the feeling must be
Knowing, but unable to prevent one's own death.

I remember the cat.

The same road, two years earlier. The person in the car in front
of me speeding, hurrying – owning the road, in the careless way a
human owns things.

I see the cat, out of nowhere.
Scared,
Stupid,
Or both, it flees.

Running, then not running.

Mother's Day

I remember the mutilated body
How the tail and hind legs
Thrashed to find an escape that would not come.

Try to try, front legs lie
Broken, useless,
Grey fur glued to the pavement in a sick imitation
Of a proud child's design.

I blink to clear the memory. The raccoon still lies there, motionless.

I have never been more upset
Being powerless to undo what's finished.

I look away from the mistakes. Focus on the asphalt man has laid
for me.

At home, I thought it couldn't get worse. I nap and the dreams
about the cat, once lost, return stronger than ever.

The sky darkens; the cicadas sing a song meant for ears of another
world. I sit on the porch and wonder what this place could be like. If
it could be better than ours.

It gets worse.

The sky is black now.
It grows chillier but the flailing cat is stuck and so am I.
Then I hear it:

A small *chitter*
Pop, pop,
A greeting

Another voice, more hesitant
Calls out in the same way

A third,
Shriller and demanding

Then a silence stretches
There is no reply.

The voices return, this time more rushed. They grow indistinguishable from one another in their need to be heard. I listen to their mews with apprehension taking bites of my heart.

A sadness grows, eating and eating as the mews turn into cries
As the whimpered questions turn into anxious pleas
As the silence comes again and I'm empty except for it.

Now I welcome the quiet, but of course it does not stay
They screech and whine
I know they will only keep crying
I know I cannot undo what has been done.

Their mother lies dead on pavement laid for me
Her skin a sack holding broken bones
Blood sticky around her like Elmer's leaking out the sides of a
Mother's Day card
Handcrafted by the child who owes its life to the milk from her
breast.

It's finished now.

I want to leave, to go inside,
Drink like I do to forget the cat, the weight of the leaves, and the
uselessness of my anger, but

I sit, unable to stop it from happening
More useless than I have ever felt
A crumpled piece of paper, wearing a mistake too big for forgiveness
Swept away when it's clean up time and the craft is complete.

I cry with them. Letting all my hate and confusion fill the air and
pretend they find comfort in my suffering.

Mother's Day

I cannot stop it
It will happen again
Tomorrow, and the next day—
Countless times, on countless roads

Sitting there listening to their devastation
I have never been smaller.

Never has my existence seemed so insignificant, and the universe so
large, unchangeable, and
Unfixable.