

Halloween Sunset on Highway 1  
By HC Flores

An owl stands in the road. Moonlight strikes the pavement, black and yellow grasses whisper. The night smells of musk and crunchy leaves. Beneath the ground a city of small furry things fatten their beds. Gnats and fireflies dip and bow, flicker like birthday candles but slower, more deliberate.

A dark place in her focus tells the owl that food will come soon. She knows this small circle of black in the ground to be an Opening--a place where food appears, always and eventually. Her father taught her that, at an Opening, if one could wait long enough, silently, in the dark, then one could eat. If one could kill, at the right time, decidedly, and without reservation, then one would never hunger. This owl waits here often, at this Opening, as do other owls she knows. Sometimes the owl flies across the plateau, visiting other Openings, singing with other owls, and searching the land for new places, new owls, new Openings.

The car comes fast onto the plateau. Oblivious, directed technology, occupied and manifested by warm fleshy bodies. Bright metal lights burn dew from the road. Man and ego and billions of tiny creatures travel from one place in time to the next. A window cracks open, and the woman in the passenger seat sucks in the crisp October air while she reads from the magazine in her lap.

"Four hundred million animals die on America's highways every year," she says to the driver. She holds up the magazine and points to a grisly photograph of a 600-pound road-kill elk on some California Interstate, spread out and wild-eyed, the caption calls this beast "an unwilling sacrifice to the vengeful gods of technology and high speed travel."

"Mmm," says he, ignoring the magazine and turning up the radio. Carole King feels the Earth move under her feet, feels the sky come tumblin' down.

The woman in the passenger seat closes her magazine and puts it in her lap. She looks at her husband for a few seconds, and then she says, "I have another lover." She rolls the window the rest of the way down and loud, icy air rushes in.

The owl turns her head, slowly, with intention. She stares into the double moons, moving faster than she thought they would. She thinks of a story about when the double moons come, about how they are different than the single moon, that changing circle in the midnight sky, so slow and safe and eternal. The double moons are fast and fierce and...

*But these moons are eternal too,* she thinks. She remembers her father's feathers, moving in the twilight breeze, brown and black with lavender down. She remembers his eyes, gold like the leaves, bright like the sun and the moon. Always the moon, always the light. Her supper arrives in the Opening, she turns to the hole and then...