

DREAMING BACK THE WILD

I am not a hunter
I am a killer
Stunned and still
in sudden headlights
my victims' end seldom comes
from a clean blow

The doe's unblinking nod
asks that I finish the deed
Instead I leave her broken at the crossing—
an unintended consequence
She never leaves me now
Each twilight she leaps onto
the roadway from a tangle of Dutch elm
to fool me into a dangerous swerve

The nocturnal badger never leaves me
He was startled from the irrigation ditch
by the freight train's scythe
of light, blasted from cover of wheatgrass
onto Highway 30 right under
the wheels of my red Corolla
I still hear the bump of the tires
without a break in momentum

The bear cub near Mt. Vernon never leaves me
Dropped like a black thought
off a steep roadcut right into
the bumper of our blue Civic
She bounced off still scampering
but the wild scent left our yellow lab
whimpering in the backseat
afraid to lie down

I dreamed the cub alive that night
heard her crying like a sick baby
in a deep canyon drenched with moonlight
her mother still licking
the wounds

They never leave me, the roadkill,
all those crippled when my machine failed
to stop—smell of burnt rubber and hot asphalt
sound of steel crushing bones
of ground squirrel
mallard duck
pheasant
night owl

If I were a hunter, their deaths
would be honored with intent
not shamed by messy mistakes
that will rise one day and judge me
by the dried blood on my wheels