

Highway to Heaven

by Taylor Dodd Geu

It was a chill autumn twilight, the leaves had been stricken off the trees by the wind, and an orange moon shone in the sky. The breeze coiled and looped through and over plants. Like Jack Frost's breath it cooled puddles left from a recent rain. Then it went over a highway, a dark river cutting through the forest. Caressing, it twirled the fur of a lone raccoon. The raccoon was old. Around his muzzle the fur had gone milky white. He stared with determination at the road, a steely stare that was clearly making a decision.

Raccoons don't see death like humans do. The choice to die is completely in their hands. In the old days, raccoons contracted the foaming madness. Sometimes they'd sink in rivers. Rarely, they let themselves get shot (a gruesome and painful demise). But now they had an easy way to leave, the highway. A raccoon now only had to sit on the road and he'd enter the tunnel and zoom towards the light. Often in the distance, the trumpets of paradise sounded. At the end his soul was swept up into paradise. The body was left deflated from its departure.

The old raccoon had recently raided garbage cans. An old cohort had accompanied him. With their nimble baby soft hands they toppled and opened the cans. Touching is how raccoons see the world. They can feel the colors of moldy fruit. A napkin

smearred with a lip print. A wilting rose with indentations from nervous fingers. A condom sent visions of a sperm graveyard. The raccoons could almost see the young, romantic couple who threw this away. Once in a while, they chattered to each other with a new development. Slowly the picture of the people was made.

After that, the raccoon's companion took the highway to heaven. Raccoon aren't close knit families. Yet, they can miss someone. The old coon was now having trouble getting at food. Young raccoons claimed food as was their right. The old had to give things up for those who would shape the future.

The raccoon had to choose now. It was scary to decide the quick end, but the alternative was to die starved. Long ago, the raccoon chose this to be the year he'd die. Now it was only the method of his release that had to be decided.

He made his decision. On stiff paws he walked on the rough tar. This wasn't the touch he wanted to leave the world on. So rough and coarse, still this was one of the best ways. The raccoon sat down. Already he was in the tunnel and he could see pin pricks of light at the end. Blaring, the horns of Paradise blew. The raccoon resignedly stared down the light.

And he was free and gone. Flying into the sky with a thousand other black masked siblings towards the moon. Towards the rest at the end of the road.

Dawn of the next day, a friend of the old raccoon saw his empty body on the road. She rubbed her arthritic hands. Quite a shame; she'd miss him in a small way. Her thoughts turned towards the coming winter. She was old and grey muzzled and chances were she'd starve to death. A snowflake drifted down onto her nose. Soon she'd have to make a choice. Hopefully, an old raccoon friend would be waiting on the other end.