Traveling through the Dark

By William E. Stafford

Traveling through the dark I found a deer dead on the edge of the Wilson River road. It is usually best to roll them into the canyon: that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing; she had stiffened already, almost cold. I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.

My fingers touching her side brought me the reason—her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting, alive, still, never to be born. Beside that mountain road I hesitated.

The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights; under the hood purred the steady engine. I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red; around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

I thought hard for us all—my only swerving—, then pushed her over the edge into the river.
