

Road Kill

by Charles Newbery

We once moved to a forest, and the darkness scared us after years of bright lights in the big city. Quick, we thought, install lights to rid the woods of the creepy animals and shadows that our three children, all under the age of six, swore they saw after only a few days of moving in.

But we didn't buy any lights.

We looked out into the darkness and then at our children. The dark of the forest was feeding them with ideas, filling their imaginations with things beautiful and things wicked. They told us of giants and pixies, of ghouls and witches. Fairies and dragons and ghosts, and of little people who lived with the ants and the beetles, and made little homes under blades of grass and in the trees. Aliens and dinosaurs roamed the forest, and dragonflies flew around the house, dragonflies so big, they told us, that they could sweep you away.

So we chose life. We chose their life, a life far more electrifying than TV.

And far more dangerous.

I was driving home to our brick house in the pine forest, and the two eldest kids were in the back egging me on to go faster, to pass the other motorists on the highway.

"Go, go, go!" they yelled

I gave them a piece of my wisdom: "Safety first, kids."

They weren't having it. "Faster, faster, faster!" they yelled.

Then they changed tactics and took over the driving from the backseat. "Quick," my eldest daughter told her brother, "you steer and I'll get us going faster."

"Like a rocket," the boy said.

I looked in the rearview mirror and saw faces of determination and of, well, trepidation, of the creeps. My eldest daughter shot her head round to look over her shoulder and out the back window.

I followed her gaze to the road behind us and I saw it. Yes, it was all happening. It was. I watched as before my very eyes the birds turned into flying dinosaurs, the stray dogs into giant beasts. The fields of corn uprooted themselves and gave chase as a giant with a cob-shaped head stretching into the sky. The cars became enormous lions racing to catch us. I drove faster and we raced through the shadow of a humungous tyrannosaurus rex who flung her neck down and opened her jaws to swallow us whole.

I could see it all.

My son turned sharply to skirt away from the ferocious jaws and my daughter pushed down the accelerator to race out of reach, and we flew forward and away from the dinosaurs and the giant monsters that gave chase.

We were out in front.

I looked back and saw the kids' faces starting to relax as we raced away from the fright.

We kept racing and there before us on the horizon we saw our town appear.

But I didn't relax. I kept my eyes peeled for anything too big for road kill.

