Roadside Rest

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You were sleeping when the last of the moon lighted
The lake white neon and
Outlined skeletal trees.
I didn’t stop at Lemon,
Where the only open establishment was
A garish, flashing saloon,
Enterance obscured by dusty pick-up trucks
Bearing large dogs, and by a group of
Paunchy dark men from the reservation.
It seemed an unwise stop for a mother and son.

After midnight, we pulled into the rutted oval,
Marked by a greyed sign,
Surrounded by tall trees,
Blacker silhouettes against a tarred sky.
We couldn’t see the river, rustling crinoline
Beyond the headlight beams.

I pretended courage
Walking to the outhouses of weathered wood
With crescent moons and gender signs.
I told you the history of ventilation moons
And remarked how ridiculous to differentiate
Between identical lack of plumbing.
I stood outside your youthful modesty,
Answering constant chattering questions--
Proof I waited at the door, guarding you
From the thousand enemies unseen in shadow,
Unheard over the river,
Beyond the reach of our feeble flashlight,
In the darkness everywhere.
I told you to walk slowly, deliberately,
Watching for uneven ground or berms,
Hoping our bravado was convincing,
That the night would not think us vulnerable,
Would not unleash its forces.
You slept then, in the green
Reflection of the dashboard,
Glad for our speed, reassured
That the river and trees would not follow.

— C. I. Edwards