

The paper man

I sat beside you
in your shiny steel car,
daydreaming
with a book in my lap,
daydreaming
until a man fluttered
into your lane
like a wind-blown
paper person.

Time slowed for an agonizing second as unforgiving metal
struck delicate flesh, the paper man flying free of the ground,
a long, slow torturous aerial ballet

before his body
bounded
off the hood
into the windscreen,
the glass
billowing
toward me
in a billion jagged shards
that clung together
like a frosted galaxy.

The tiniest smudge of his blood on my open page
before his body bounced and rolled and flopped
and rested
in the middle of that sweltering mess
of a freeway.

Mother, you killed a man
on that hot slow day.
His blood spilling like red lava
on the blistered tar.

The policeman shook his head.
Just another dead black man
to clean up before lunch,
just another paper man burning in the sun.

I wondered why you didn't care
what his name was—
how you couldn't hear
the wind screaming
through the broken galaxy
on the drive home.

Later on that hot slow day
I made you a cup of sweet tea.
You took a sip and
shook and sobbed and spilt your drink
on your bare legs
and I stopped wondering
what it was like to kill a man.

Eventually the blood in the book turned brown.
Just another unread story,
just a piece of paper man.
I put it back on the shelf.