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## Back Country

Gnarled peach pits of roads.  
Roads that started and stopped without purpose.  
Growling dogs lined up, their snouts thrust  
through the diamonds of chain linked fences.  
Sometimes a mangy hound darted onto the gravel  
growling like a disgruntled spectator  
impatient for the parade to start.  
One dog looked no fiercer than the rest.  
The only clue the way he stood, a stone guard  
to the underworld, tongue hanging motionless.  
Then he lunged, tore the jeans around the knee,  
skin jagged glass, a ribbon of blood dribbled  
down my leg onto the dirt.  
I opened my mouth but no sound emerged.  
The dog turned, satisfied.  
It was a long time before I ventured onto the back roads again.  
Maybe the place was cursed, for the next time  
I stumbled on a dead deer down by Higgonbotham Creek.  
I couldn't bear the doe's open eyes.  
Its head tilted slightly, the way a child might,  
not understanding a new word.  
The next day I snuck there again.  
The deer's ribs were partially naked, a bleached arc

protecting where the heart once was, now unbuttoned.  
Something else had visited, stealing scraps of muscle  
but leaving no trail of skin or bloody coils to follow.  
The doe shrunk daily, my shrine, devoid of incense,  
baskets of fruit, a lit candle.  
I couldn't stay away, so set up camp in the field.  
The black cows didn't much mind  
or the blind goat with the orange tag  
hanging from one ear.  
Don't sleep I told myself, determined to protect  
my treasure, but I did, even as I resisted,  
shaking my head like a metronome,  
but without rhythm or melody  
to comfort me into the cold night.  
When I awoke a hoof was gone.  
No track of the thief.  
Defeated, jealous,  
I shouted and stomped before the shards of bone.

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Carol V. Davis is the author of *Between Storms* (Truman State University Press, 2012). She won the 2007 T.S. Eliot Prize for *Into the Arms of Pushkin: Poems of St. Petersburg*. Her poetry has been read on NPR radio, Radio Russia and at the Library of Congress.