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BLOOD ON THE HIGHWAY

By Beth Dotson Brown

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1W / 1M

Setting:

An undeveloped stretch of highway.

Characters:

Ella; Mother of Emmalina, who has been killed in an accident on the highway

Edmund; Emmalina's younger brother, a young teenager.

BLOOD ON THE HIGHWAY

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(AT RISE: The sound of a car coming to a stop, the engine out and a car door opening. After a long pause the door shuts. Ella enters carrying some cardboard, a paint brush and florescent paint.)

ELLA

Come on Edmund. It's time to get to work. *(Sounds of cars and trucks driving by.)* Edmund, now! *(A car door opens and closes. EDMUND enters. ELLA hands him the cardboard and paint.)* Here, Edmund. It should say: "Lane closed ahead."

EDMUND

No, Ma. This too dangerous. We're not road workers. They won't see us.

ELLA

Like they didn't see Emmalina? *(EDMUND looks at his feet.)* You'll do this for your sister. *(EDMUND picks up the sign and nods his head yes. ELLA exits as EDMUND sets to work. She re-enters several times, first carrying jugs of water, along with scouring pads and a new bottle of bleach. She puts them on the pavement next to a large, dark spot. Next, she enters with pots of lilacs and lines them up around the spot like road cones.)*

EDMUND

(EDMUND looks up briefly.) Ma, you couldn't get something better than that? No one will see them.

ELLA

They are your sister's favorite flowers. They will protect us. *(EDMUND shakes his head no and rolls his eyes. He holds the sign up to show his mother.)*

EDMUND

How's this?

ELLA

Very good. *(Sound of a car speeding by.)*

EDMUND

(Pleading.) Ma, it's not safe. You can't do this.

ELLA

Life is not safe, Edmund. It is not. We cannot change that. But we can change this, and we will. We will not leave Emmalina lying here. *(A truck goes by and blows its horn.)*

EDMUND

See that, ma. They won't see us!

ELLA

(Calm.) They will. You will stand down there just off the road with the sign, then I'll place the pots further in the lane to show it is closed.

EDMUND

What if they don't pay attention?

ELLA

(Irritated.) I'll put the flashers on in the car. They'll see it. *(EDMUND still looks worried. ELLA's expression softens and she walks over to him and puts her arms around him as best she can while he is holding the sign. When she pulls back, he wipes away tears.)*

EDMUND

Please be careful, Ma.

ELLA

You, too. *(EDMUND goes to hold up the sign at one side of the stage. ELLA goes to the spot with the cleaning equipment.)*

ELLA

(She looks at the spot, then the gloves, which she discards on the pavement. She opens the bleach and a jug of water.) Oh, my little girl. My Emmalina. . . Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou, among women, and blessed is the fruit . . .

EDMUND

(Looking at the sky.) Papa, where are you? We need you now. You see, there was an accident, with Emmalina. And this is the place. I always thought it was the road out of this stinking little town, the road to the rest of the world. She did, too. But not now. Now it's the road to the end of the world. We need you. Couldn't you please come back? This would be a really good time for you to show up.

ELLA

(Scrubbing.) Now, Emmalina. You were always a good girl. All of your teachers liked you. You went to church with me on Sundays. You were nice to your brother, *(smiling)* most of the time. So I don't think you have to worry. God will watch over you. Do not worry about it. *(Pause)* Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee . . .

EDMUND

(Glances over at his mother.) Papa, she has been praying since she got the telephone call from the hospital. She dropped the phone and ran out the door saying the Hail Mary. And ever since, she keeps praying, and talking to her. I'm worried about Ma.

ELLA

And I was always there for you Emmalina. I went to work at your school when you started so I could be near you. I took you to your friends' houses when you asked. I picked you up when you had rehearsals after school. *(Pause)* I know he left us and it hurt you, but

ELLA, *Continued*

believe me, it was for the better. Oh, he loved us all at one time. But he disappeared before he ever left us. I was not going to let him spend our grocery money on his bottles. Nor was I going to let him yell at you when he was in one of his rages. So I changed the locks. I know it hurt you when he didn't come back. But I did it because I loved you, and Edmund. All your father ever left us was black scuff marks on the door from when he tried to kick it down with his boots. *(She stops scrubbing and looks over at Edmund, listening to him.)*

EDMUND

Papa, she tried. Ma has tried so hard to be good to us, to be mother and father at the same time. She really yelled once in awhile, wouldn't cut us a break at all. Sometimes it's been like being in the Army, but I guess she thought it was best. But it's not. What we need is you. We needed you then, and we really need you now. Papa . . .

ELLA

Edmund, your papa . . . I shouldn't have given him the car keys. I guess I was thinking that blue Impala was plenty big enough for him to sleep in. But with keys, you can also drive it. *(She returns to scrubbing.)* Hail Mary, full of grace . . .

EDMUND

Papa, I'm afraid for her. She's really lost it. She said we had to come out here so she could wash Emmalina's blood from the highway. It's crazy. Emmalina is gone. She's not here. But Ma says she is. *(He cries.)*

ELLA

(Ella scrubs furiously.) To heaven, my child. To the angels you go. Mother Mary will protect you. She will take you to her son Jesus, who will be standing at the gate to welcome you.

EDMUND

Papa, I went with her to see the undertaker. I was afraid of how she would act if she went alone. He told her that, that Emmalina's hair was so clumped together with blood, in the back, where she got hit, I guess, that they had to cut it off.

ELLA

But she'll still be beautiful in the casket. She will.

EDMUND

She screamed, papa. Not at the man, maybe at God, I don't know. She just screamed. But she didn't cry. I haven't seen her cry yet. *(Loud noise of truck going by and honking. One of the pots falls over and breaks. EDMUND jogs over and ELLA walks, both meeting at the broken pot.)*

EDMUND

(Pointing.) That car hit it.

ELLA

(Clenches her teeth as she stares after the car and mutters.) It was a blue car. An Impala?

EDMUND

(Looking after it.) Papa?

ELLA

(Mumbling and staring down the road.) A blue car. They said it was a blue car.

EDMUND

Ma, what are you talking about? There are hundreds of blue cars.

ELLA

The one that got your sister. They said it was blue. *(Sound of truck horn and wind.)*

EDMUND

It's not safe, Ma. Let's go!

ELLA

Not yet! I have to wash away the blood. Emmalina has to be free from this suffering so she can ascend to be with the angels. This is the only way! *(ELLA runs back to her scrubbing job and EDMUND looks after her, then goes back to hold up his sign.)*

EDMUND

Papa? Are you there, somewhere, anywhere? It's been years . . . I'm almost a man now. *(Pause, then whispering.)* Do you still drive that blue Impala? *(ELLA kneels down and pours a lot of bleach onto the spot. She scrubs furiously.)*

ELLA

I'm taking care of it Emmalina. I'm taking care of it so you can go. Be with the angels. Leave this pain behind. You deserve some peace. *(Her voice begins to crack with tears.)* Hail Mary, full of grace. . .

EDMUND

Papa, they didn't say it, but we know the driver was drunk. We know what causes accidents out here. But who in his right mind could be drunk before noon? *(Screams.)* Who?

This is Not the End of the Play
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