

LEN GASPARINI

GREAT HORNED OWL

Driving late at night on US 71
bound for Baton Rouge and beyond
in a rental van two days overdue,
tankful of gas, deep woods all around, no traffic,
my high beams cut out a cave in the darkness.
I had to reach New Orleans by dawn.

Suddenly something thudded
against the van's front fender.
I swerved, I braked, I stopped on the shoulder.
The half-moon hung above the pines.
A bush of feathers. Ear tufts, talons ...
An owl. A great horned owl. Dead.

I lifted that beautiful bird
off the highway; slid my hands over
its plumage streamlined and soft.
It felt as if the owl was still flying.
I laid it down on some grasses,
and followed my shadow back to the van.