

ACCIDENT

Ellen Shiels

[Assignment: Based on your direct observations, write a description of a place that conveys feeling (delight, awe, disappointment, amusement, etc.) more through recording of details than through statement of attitude. Try to blend subjective and objective points of view, to appeal to at least three senses, to highlight special features of the subject and to arrange details in a logical pattern.]

(1) We were startled at the sudden flash of the brake lights. A car had skidded; there had been an accident. We felt that we couldn't just leave; we knew first aid. So we stopped.

(2) Fumes from different motor fluids seemed to sizzle off the tollway, and metal and glass mixed in the fluids glistened in the headlights. Our eyes took a minute to focus, and we realized that it wasn't blood on the pavement but brake fluid. No one had been injured, and we saw soon enough that there was nothing we could do.

(3) Stina and I leaned over the cement wall that marked the edge of the overpass. It was a whirlwind; the wake from the cars that flew by twisted my hair into my face. I clung to the cold metal cylinder railing as I looked down, my hair flapping like wings behind me.

(4) The seemingly bottomless pit beneath us gaped wider as we watched; we could not see what lay below us. It was so dark, very black. Gusts rushed up and stung my eyes. Stina laughed. She flew high on it; the thought of tragedy had excited us and something was bound to give us a rush. This Friday night it happened to be Highway 294.

(5) It was not just the highway. It was also the night and the accident. But, then, I'd never stood on the tollway before. That's not really why it is there. That moment Stina and I bonded instantly, because we both stood in the middle of an insane vortex of wind and darkness and light, looking at something we couldn't really see. I felt her presence but we were separate, isolated by the wind. It took away our voices, and the passing traffic pulled with it any sound that we could make.

(6) The shoulder didn't seem as wide as it had before. The cars flew by so quickly, and we could have reached out and touched them if we had wanted. Completely perilous, completely ridiculous. We didn't need to be there, but there we were, standing like fools as the woman involved in the accident called for help on the car phone in her Mercedes. It was obviously not the job for us. That really didn't matter; at least we had tried to be heroes.

(7) We got back in the car and drove on in silence. The moment had shattered, and we had left it on the tollway with the bits of broken glass and shards of metal. But it had given 294 a little bit of something we didn't know it had.