**Black Dog**  
*by Laylage Courie*

**FIRST**  
Black dog, in this city we said would not hold us, you are holed up here in this lovely house. Yes, I said Lovely. But it is also empty. And cold. It wants a light in its middle it wants

1. familiar smells and scuffed tracks  
2. a cake cut on the counter  
3. a fly buzzing in the trash  
4. a screen open to the murmur of rain  
5. a book with a cornered page.

This house is lonely.  
Its only joy is your music  
thumping its walls  
like a dazed swallow.

*Singing:  
Black dog  
with a rusty hook  
crooked through his paw*

But I did say “lovely.” There is room to breathe. A whole room for nothing but breathing. A whole room to hold his darkness as loosely as cupped hands hold a trembling moth.

*Where he walks  
welt-red flowers bloom.*

**PRECEDED BY**  
Six years after I last saw him, I walk into the bar for an eight o’clock film. I see him (unchanged) seeing me (I want to say: changed). He rises as if lifted from his seat by a groin-hooked string. Some god more robust than time slaps my cheeks. I blush, a long-legged sixteen years old, (mistrustful, shy) bear his embrace briefly, slump into a booth and try to tell him what I’ve lived through. Feeling sixteen, I sound ridiculous.

*Have no past.*

Buy me another drink.

*Every moment is  
a fish arced  
in its nonnative air  
scales sparkling  
like pomegranate seeds.*
Let’s not plunge into
the years that lie
between me and you.

_LATER_

Cigarettes, coffee, him, me, on a cement patio where gas tanks used to be. The view
loops like an ampersand through

1. foothills
2. black cherry
3. broom switch
4. pine
5. water tower
6. railroad
7. truck yard

all under a winter southern sky

whose watery gold snaps my heart as if it were a cane stalk (my heart gives and gives
then snaps apart.) I hear it snap with his simple answer to:  _What brought you back here?_

**It is so easy.** Voice deep and muddy, the Ocmulgee after winter rains.

He uses it too sparingly. _Say something else._ I feel ready to bundle my self up and set its
course, with him as companion, down any once-familiar road.

_AFTER_

In his house.

It is empty. And cold.

I sit on a dirty rug. He sits in a vinyl chair.

I look up. My skin blues in a gas flame

(his eyes).

What I want to do

is put my hands in your black thick hair.

What I want to do

is take your hands

the hands that play the instrument you hold in your arms

and put them

here.
Pluck out of steel strings
every unquenchable thing
(thirst, lust, the wit that hits hot coal like water)
and
yes
beauty
sad and tender
let it fray the fretwork
strip the wires
work its way out out out
a delicate cloud
of crepuscular wings.

Almost ready.

3 A.M.

I watch him drive. *Take me home to the house I grew up in along this road I no longer know*. The road that runs the yardage of time we’ve known since we were born. The road is too wide. It switchblades great swathes of developed land where I remember there being only fields, a school, one small grocery store.

We pass the church on the hill

1. the steeple top scaled
   The steeple top
   interior scaffolding scaled
   cold as starlight
   cold sweat
   in darkness towards darkness towards a
   glass door
   lock busted
   chain broken
   door forced open
   onto a decorative balcony or ledge
   at the top of the steeple
   at the top of the church
   at the top of the hill
   my hands shaking

   cool air, acres, acres of night.

2. a summer funeral
   The furious glare
   of afternoon on the white portico
3. His hands in my hair

You pulled a broom out to fight the flirting ex-con brought down from the hills social charity mingling good influence they snuck us cigarettes in the Sunday school hall smells of baby powder and crayons and old mimeograph ink. We share a pillow you, me, one con (Doug?) says “I’m a leg man myself, what about you?” You answered “I like all parts of a woman’s body” I folded my legs up under me, sat on my feet.

The road is lined with sulfurous lamps marking entrance, exit ramps. The church on he hill is buried in subdivisions by an elevated bypass four lanes wide. I DON’T KNOW WHERE THIS ROAD GOES ANYMORE. What have I lived through? Soon my past won’t even have a grave. The remaining remembered places buried by bulldozers in a bed of gravel.

His truck’s motor rattles like an old projector. How long have I known those hands? Coarse-haired, delicate boned? I watch him drive. His skin is blue white like the moon.

The church on the hill is.

LAST

Black dog. Black brother. Companion of night of home of passing time I burn not to shed light (black dog I shed no light on the black soils of your or anybody’s night) but to brand you, this moment with you (and every other unquenchable thing) into the skins of night, the skins of the fish who arc out of darkness into light

*When they surface (dazzling, convulsive)*
*they will be recognized.*

I am ready. *Black dog.*