

## **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.

*Around each moment  
the water is black and still.*

### **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.

*In still water, weeds collect  
fish heads, plastic,  
snake skins, tire scraps,  
bottles, bird necks.*

Almost ready.

### **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

school friends shuffling, joking  
eyes askance tossing glances  
at you like flowers.

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 the 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.*

