

Dog, South

Padding south - a bitch - following the tramlines, or kind of. Stopping now and then to smell a smell, to avoid any roaming child; distracted now and then, waiting carefully at crossings, watching for every green man until it came. All the while, at a gentle pace, with a traipsing, slightly angled tack. It was almost hungry and stopped at the gates of a house with a large garden filled with people: some kind of party. It weaved guiltily in amongst them, following the smell of burning meat. Everyone thought it was somebody else's dog. It slipped in, nosed around the bins, disgusted by the scent of spilled beer, following that same nose into the house where people were talking, eating, drinking wine, sensing an odd kind of nervous energy that seemed to emanate from down in the basement. Of course, the dog could go anywhere. Unchallenged, it padded down the wooden steps, down into the damp, the sound of dripping water, perhaps a leak, where more people milled around, a frowning woman, staring at screens, images of interiors, some real, some atomising in a way that made the dog stare down there amongst the damp, making the same involuntary half bark it would never know it made when it dreamed, as it padded back up the steps past the woman. Outside, the dog sensed that some of the tension had been released, noticed a woman and a man on a seesaw, watching bemused, its head moving to trace each bounce. The people increased, the dog unaware. As someone sang and played the piano in front of a fruit stall, a tall, unsmiling man surreptitiously offered an unwanted sausage under the table, looking around for its owner. The dog took it away gingerly - the man was not to be trusted - walked off, laid the morsel at its feet, continued to watch as the tension returned, the people flooded into the sound of a busy bar as the dog was distracted by the odour of aerosol and a woman busily, clumsily painting an object in blues and reds. It watched and said nothing, thought about beginning on the sausage, could not know the couple on the table above it were falling apart, that the next always agreed on everything, that the next were plotting something, then picked up and carried the sausage to a quieter part of the garden to where a kind of fetish had somehow been formed on the washing line: a face, a forbidding clown of half wet clothes, dripping tea towels. A timorous voice sang out from the main house, a brief snap of feedback causing the dog's ears to set back for a moment as it left that part of the garden,

distracted this time by two women, servants of some kind, carrying food and wine, offering it unusually slowly to the seated guests and the dog whined again for a second and realised it had forgotten to bring the sausage. Would these two women offer it the food? Were they dealing out gobbets of meat? Its stomach tightened, it sniffed around them, waiting. Their slowness made the dog anxious and it raised its nose to begin a howl that never quite came. It grew bored, restless and passed a woman dancing. She was dancing for herself, for herself only, though she was watched by any number of guests who were too shy to dance in daylight, were not yet drunk enough. The dog passed by, unnoticed, uninterested; found, retrieved the sausage, covered now in ants and ate it down in a few quick gulps. It sat on its paws and dozed off, making the same half bark in its dream, a dream in which it was circling around some strange trash pile in some nameless desert, populated by other dogs, all unfriendly, diseased and violent. It woke in a violet light, the sound of a glass breaking, a man hanging painted shirts, disoriented by a strange series of clicks and beats. The dog nosed around the garden for a little longer, then skittered off into the night, under the stars, again.

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