

Spring 1993

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Recommended Citation

Anderson, Kent (1993) "*from* Night Dogs," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 40 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss40/11>

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Kent Anderson

from *Night Dogs*

Every June 15th out at North Precinct, "A" relief and graveyard shift started killing dogs. If they were asked about it, the police brass and local politicians smiled, shook their heads, and said it was one of those old myths about the precinct that just wouldn't die.

The cops at North Precinct called them "Night Dogs," feral dogs, wild and half-wild, who roamed the districts after dark. Their ancestors had been pets, beaten and abandoned by their owners to breed and give birth on the streets. Some paused only long enough to eat the afterbirth before leaving their newborns to die. But there were others, gaunt and weak, who suckled and watched over their mewling litters. Yellow-eyed, their gums bleeding, they carried them one by one to some new safe place every few nights, out of instinct. Or out of love. You might call it love, but none of the cops at North ever used that word.

Survivors were lean and quick, Pit Bull and Doberman in their blood, averaging fifty or sixty pounds. Anything smaller eventually starved to death if it wasn't run down and killed by larger dogs, cornered by children with rocks and bats, or caught in the street by flaring headlights after the bars closed. A quick death the only good luck those dogs would ever know before they were plowed into reeking landfills or dumped in the "Dead Animal Bin" behind the Humane Society gas chamber.

Night Dogs carried a scent of fear and rot in their fur, and the cops at North Precinct said they could smell them in the dark—stalking the chain-link fences of restaurant parking lots on graveyard shift, prowling supermarket dumpsters or crouched, ears back, in the shadows of McDonald's dark arches. When the

winter rains came, and food got scarce, they ate their own shit and each other.

They waited for night in fire-gutted houses and boarded up cellars, abandoned buildings the neighborhood used as garbage dumps before setting them on fire.

Most of the cops would have let the dogs live their wretched lives, but too many were crazy, vicious from inbreeding, putrid food, brain damage. Some thought just the stress of everyday survival made them that way. Everybody had a theory, but in the end it didn't matter.

When radio sent a patrol car on a dog bite, to "check for an ambulance," they usually found children, lying absolutely still, trying to distance themselves from the pain that hurt them worse if they cried. Their eyes gave away nothing, the pupils huge and distant in their bloody faces, as if they had just seen a miracle.

Sometimes the dogs attacked grown men, even cops, as if they *wanted* to die, growing bolder and more dangerous in the summer, when people stayed out after dark, and rabies began to spread. It came with warm weather, carried by the night wind and nocturnal animals gone mad—prehistoric possums with pig eyes and needle teeth, squealing in the alleys. Rats out on the sidewalks at noon, sluggish and dazed. Raccoons hissing in the nettles and high grass along culverts and polluted golf course creeks. Bats falling from the sky, and dreamy-eyed skunks staggering out of the West Hills, choking on their own tongues, their hearts shuddering with the virus they carried, an evil older than cities or civilization—messengers perhaps, sent by some brooding, wounded promise we betrayed and left for dead back when the world was still only darkness and frozen seas.

Late one night at the Police Club, some of the cops from North

were talking about it. They'd been drinking for quite a while when a cop named Hanson said you couldn't really blame the dogs.

Well hell, who *do* you blame then?

Someone back in the corner slammed his beer down.

Fuck blame. You just kill 'em.

APRIL 1975

It had been raining all week. The night before there had been a thunderstorm, unusual for April, but on Thursday afternoon it was the normal Oregon drizzle, and neither of the two cops bothered to wear a raincoat. Hanson was wearing the yellow "happy face" pin that he'd taken off the body of a kid who'd OD'd on heroin back in December. He'd found him dead in a gas station bathroom, long blond hair and gray skin, sitting on the toilet, the needle still in his arm. The pin was a little sun-face of close-set eyes and a mindless smile that seemed to say, "I'm harmless and nice." He'd noticed the pin in the bottom of his locker before roll call that afternoon, and had stuck it on his shirt just above the gold police badge.

The two cops walked around to the back of the house and tried the door. The dispatcher had sent them to "check on the welfare" of the old man who lived there, to see if he was dead. One of the neighbors had called and said that she was worried. She hadn't seen him in a week.

A row of bug-eaten rose bushes bordered the house. They had grown over and into one another, forming a ragged hedge. The blossoms had been battered by the thunderstorm, half their petals fallen, frail pink, veined and translucent as eyelids on the wet grass. The whole yard smelled of roses.

Dana, the big cop, knocked on the door with his flashlight and shouted, "Police." Hanson picked up a rose petal, smelled it, then put it on his tongue. "Police," Dana shouted.

They found an unlocked window, and both of them pushed up on it. Layers of old paint cracked and splintered off the frame as it broke free. They muscled it open three inches before it wedged to a stop and the sweet stink of a dead body rolled out on a wave of hot air.

When Dana kicked the back door, the knob fell off and the little window shattered, sucking a greasy curtain out through the splinters. He kicked again and the door shuddered. A shard of glass dropped onto the concrete stoop.

"Maybe you're too old for this," Hanson said.

Dana smiled at him, a little out of breath, took half a step back and drove the heel of his boot into the door. The frame splintered and the door swung open in an explosion of glass and paint chips, dust and splintered wood.

A burner on the electric stove in the kitchen glowed sullenly, its heat touching Hanson's cheek through the rancid air. Dirty plates and bowls were piled by the sink, and in one of them, something that had once been red was turning green. A pair of pink-and-yellow dentures waited beneath gray dishwater that rippled with mosquito larva. "Police," Hanson called, "Police Officers," breathing shallowly, the sweet air like fog on his face.

The room beyond the kitchen seemed very long, narrowing and murky at the far end, and as he held his breath, he felt like a diver working his way through a sunken ship.

Thousands of green flies covered the windows like curtains, shimmering in the gray light as they beat against the glass.

The old man was in the living room, lying on his back. He'd

been dead for days, and the body was ripe. His chest and belly had ballooned, arching his back in a wrestler's bridge, as if he was still struggling against death. His eyes and beard and shaggy hair sparkled silver-white with energy, boiling with maggots. Broken capillaries highlighted his features with a tracery of dried blood, shadowing his forehead and nose and cheekbones like brutal makeup. He was wearing a set of one-piece underwear, the kind that buttons up the front, and he was so swollen that all the buttons had torn out, ripping open from neck to crotch.

The old man's chest and belly were translucent as wax, mottled with terrible blue bruises where the blood had pooled after he died. One foot had turned black as iron. The two cops stood over him, breathing through their mouths. The furnace hummed beneath the floor, pumping out heat. Flies droned and battered the windows. Something coughed behind them and they spun around, hands on their guns.

It was a small black dog. He was very old, his muzzle gray, the fur worn off the backs of his legs. He was trying to growl, shivering with the effort. He looked up at them without fear, with the dignity that old dogs have. Both blind eyes were milky white.

"Look here, old dog," Dana said, "it's just the *Po*-lice." He knelt down and slowly moved his hand to stroke the dog's head. "Been hot in here, hasn't it?" He went into the kitchen and brought back a bowl of water that the dog lapped up slowly, not stopping until it was all gone.

They turned off the furnace, then beat the flies away from the front windows and opened them. Hanson saw the envelope taped to the wall above the telephone. Where the address should be were the words, "When I die please see that my daughter, Sarah Stockner, gets this envelope. Her phone number is listed below.

Thank you." It was signed, "Cyrus Stockner." Beneath his signature he'd written in ink, "I'd appreciate it if you'd look after my dog Truman."

Hanson called the number and a man answered. "Hello," Hanson said, "this is Officer Hanson from the Police Bureau. Is Sarah Stockner there?"

"That's my wife's maiden name. It's Sarah Jensen now."

"Is her father's name Cyrus Stockner?"

"Right. What's the problem? My wife isn't here."

"Mr. Stockner is dead. We're at his house. On Albina Street?"

Hanson thought he could hear a radio transmission in the static. He checked the safety snap on his holster, out of habit, as he did dozens of times during the shift.

"Sir?"

"Some nigger junkie did it, right? Son of a bitch."

"It looks like a natural death. There's an envelope here addressed to your wife. We could bring it by if you'd like."

"I'll come over there and get it. I don't want a police car in the driveway."

"Mr. Jensen, he's been dead for quite a while. It's kind of unpleasant here."

"Lovely. That's just great. I'll be there in ten minutes. Is that okay?"

"Sure," Hanson said. "We'll be here for a while."

He looked at the phone for a moment, then hung it up and walked across the hall to the bedroom. The covers on the bed had been thrown back, and he wondered if the old man had gotten up just so he wouldn't die in bed. Books filled the wall-to-wall glass-fronted book cases and magazines were stacked on the floor beneath them—*Scientific American*, *Popular Mechanics*, *National*

Geographic, something called *Science and Design*, published in England, many of them dating back to the thirties. Hanson picked one up and thumbed through it. The old man had bracketed paragraphs and underlined sentences in pencil. Down the margin of one page he'd written "This kind of easy ambiguous conclusion is the heart of the problem. They're afraid to make the difficult decisions."

Some of the books went back to the 1800s. Hanson picked up one with the word "STEAM" embossed in gold letters across the leather cover. A golden planet Earth spun beneath the word STEAM, powered through its orbits by two huge elbow pipes, one sticking out of the Pacific Ocean, the other rising from North Africa, both of them pumping golden clouds of steam. The book was filled with flow charts and numerical tables, exploded diagrams of valves and heat-return systems, fine engravings of steam boilers. It was as if the book contained all the rules for a predictable steam-driven Universe, a World of order and dependability.

Photographs covered one wall, old photographs where the hands and faces of people passing in the background were streaked and blurred by their movement. The old man, alive, looked out at Hanson from them, his age changing from twenty to fifty, a mustache there, a beard in one, looking out from the beams and pipes of a power plant, standing by a Ford coupe on a dirt road, holding a stringer of trout, looking out from each one as if he had something to tell him, something that Hanson had been trying to figure out for a long time. A double-barrelled Winchester shotgun with exposed hammers stood propped in the corner next to the bed. Hanson picked it up, brought it to his shoulder, then lowered it and thumbed it open. Brass-cased buckshot rounds shone in the steel receiver. When he closed the

gun, the action clicked shut like tumblers in a lock.

Hanson looked out through the bedroom door at the old man. He thought of the thunderstorm the night before, and imagined lightning, like flash powder for old photos, blazing through the house, lighting the room for an instant, freezing it in time. The old man, the dog, and the green-and-gold curtains of flies swarming the windows.

Dana's voice came up through the floor, calling him down to the basement.

"He made this," Dana said, spinning the chrome-silver wheel of a lathe. "Hand-ground those carbon steel blades. Look," he said, slapping the cast-iron base, "the bearings, the bed, everything. The best craftsmen make their own tools.

"That's a forge over there," he said, pointing. "He could melt steel in that. In his basement. And come on over here," he said, "look at this work bench...."

"Hello? Are you down there?" It was the medical examiner at the top of the stairs, his face flushed, wearing a wrinkled gray suit. He looked like a salesman down on his luck. "It's a ripe one all right. I just hope we can get it in the bag intact."

The three of them went out to the M.E.'s station wagon. The sun had come out and the grass was steaming. Dana helped him unfold the aluminum gurney and Hanson pulled out the body bag. He prepared himself for that acrid smell of rubberized plastic, like the dead air leaking from a tire.

*

They had known that the North Vietnamese were planning to attack the launch site. The agent reports, radio intercepts, recon sightings, everything pointed to a battalion-size force. They were

out there, building up, waiting for the right night to blow the wire and overrun the camp while C-120 transports brought in supplies during the daylight hours. They low-lexed the stuff, afraid to land, coming down only long enough to touch their wheels on the little airstrip, kick the aluminum pallets out the back as the engines roared, then take off again.

Hanson remembered the sound of the engines straining for altitude and the pop of small arms fire coming from the jungle beyond the wire, the thud of the pallets when they hit the runway and skidded to a stop through clouds of red dust. Most of the pallets contained ammunition and canned food, but one morning, when they drove the old deuce-and-a-half truck out to the runway, they found a crate of body bags.

"Body bags," Hanson had shouted as he drove, skidding and bumping, back into the camp. "Who the fuck cares? They want us neat and all bagged-up when we're dead."

They were stacking the bags in the shed where they kept the red wooden coffins when Hanson proposed the body bag sack race. "Like a 4th of July gunny-sack race," he said.

They marked off a fifty-yard course along the inner perimeter road, then Hanson, Quinn, Silver and Dawson each climbed into a body bag and zipped it up chest high. "Now," Hanson shouted. "Get ready. For God and America. Hop!" The four of them hopped down the dirt road in the sun, pulling the bags up to their chins, the hot rubber smell pumping up into their faces with each hop. Silver heat shimmered above the road. The dog, Hose, his deformed head tilted to the side, ran alongside, wheezing and barking. Hanson won the race and they all fell down, out of breath, laughing as the dog ran from one to the other licking their faces.

Silver was dead two days later, and three weeks after that Hanson watched Quinn die.

*

They tucked the body bag under and around the old man, like a rubber sleeping bag, and zipped it closed. Hanson slipped his hands beneath the bloated shoulders and the M.E. took the feet.

"Real easy now," the M.E. said, "easy..."

As they lifted the body there was a sound like someone sitting up suddenly in the bathtub, but not exactly like that, as the weight shifted, and they dumped the bag on the gurney where it quivered like a water bed. The M.E. said, "Damn."

"Damn," he said again. "What a week. Monday I had to police up a skydiver whose chute didn't open. That's a stupid so-called 'sport' if you ask me. And the next day there was the son of a bitch—pardon my French—out in the county, who shot himself in the kitchen and left the stove on. The body popped. It exploded before anybody found it. One hundred and nineteen degrees in that trailer house. That's official. I hung a thermometer. I mean, is that some cheap, thoughtless behavior, or what? People just don't think. If you want to kill yourself, fine. That's your business. But show a little courtesy to others. The world goes on, you know."

A supervisor had to cover any situation involving a death, even if it was a natural, and Sergeant Bendix was out in front of the house, standing by his patrol car, nodding and listening to the man in khaki trousers and blue dress shirt who had driven up in a grey Mercedes. The M.E. drove off in his county station wagon as Dana and Hanson walked over to them. Hanson's wool uniform was still damp, heavy and hot in the sun. It would be at least another month, he thought, before the department switched over

to short-sleeve shirts. Bendix watched them come, tapping his own chest as he looked straight at Hanson. "The happy face," Dana said.

Hanson glanced down at the yellow face that smiled from his shirt as if saying, "If you like everybody, everybody will like you." He took it off and dropped it in his breast pocket.

They nodded to Mr. Jensen as Bendix introduced him.

"Not much doubt it was a natural," Dana told them, "but the body's been in there quite a while."

"The end of a perfect day," Jensen said. He looked at the house and shook his head. "He was a smart man. He'd secured patents on a few of his inventions. Nothing that ever made money. A smart man, but his own worst enemy." He looked at Hanson, and Hanson nodded.

"We had the money to move him out of this neighborhood and put him in a home. I mean a nice place. Not a nursing home. Where there were other people he could relate to. It was the only sensible thing to do, but he wouldn't even talk about it," Jensen said, looking at the house where a seedy robin in the front yard cocked his head and studied a patch of dead grass with one eye.

"In denial," Sergeant Bendix said.

The robin pecked the grass.

"A refusal to come to terms with his own mortality," Sergeant Bendix said. "Quite common at his age."

The bird flew off as Aaron Allen's Cadillac pulled out of an alley in the middle of the next block, the radio thumping bass as it rolled across the street and disappeared into the mouth of the opposite alley.

"He said he'd shoot anyone who tried to move him," Jensen said.

"Where's that envelope?" Sergeant Bendix said.

"Still in the house," Dana said. "What about the dog?"

"Dog?" Jensen said. "What dog?"

"An old black dog. About this big. Sir."

"Is that dog still alive?"

"Correct. That's why I mentioned it."

"Thank you, Officer. Having done that, could you call the appropriate agency to dispose of it? Put it out of its misery?" Jensen said, looking at his watch. "Sergeant," he said, turning to Bendix, "can you people take care of that for me? It's not a major problem is it? I have to go home and deal with a hysterical wife. I have a funeral to work out. I'm going to have to think of something to do with that house and all the shit in it...."

"We'll take care of it, Mr. Jensen," Sergeant Bendix said. "Can we do that?" he said, turning to Dana and Hanson.

"Sure," Dana said.

"I'll get the envelope," Hanson said.

The envelope was taped to the wall just below a large framed document that declared Cyrus Stockner to be a member of The International Brotherhood of Machinists. It was printed in color with gilt edges. The fine engraving in each corner showed men at work—turning a silver cylinder of steel on a lathe, measuring tolerances with calipers, others standing at a forge, yellow and gold clouds of heat and smoke rolling over them. The center of the document was dominated by a huge black and silver steam engine tended by powerfully built men wearing engineer's caps.

"Do me a favor and get the rest of that asshole's information? I'm afraid I'll say something that'll get me some time off."

"Okay," Hanson said, peeling the envelope off the wall. "You're gettin' awful sensitive in your old age."

"You know what's gonna happen to that?" Dana said, looking at the document. "You know what he's gonna do with that, and the tools, and the books? All of it. If the neighborhood assholes don't set the place on fire first. After ripping off anything they can sell to buy dope."

He turned and looked out the door at Jensen and Bendix. "He's gonna shit-can it. He won't even take the trouble to give it away. He'll just pay somebody to haul it to the dump."

The dog stood staring up at the cops, listening to Dana.

"Shit," Dana said, kneeling down to stroke the dog's head. "You can come on with us. We'll work something out."

After Jensen and Sergeant Bendix left, Dana took a hammer and a handful of nails from the basement and began to nail the back door shut. The dog followed Hanson as he walked through the house, closing and locking the windows.

He took one more look around the bedroom, kneeling at the bookcases to read the titles on the lower shelves, touching some of the books. He paused at each photo, half hoping for some revelation, but the sun had moved and thrown them into shadow.

After several false starts, the dog hopped stiffly onto the bed and curled up. As if it was just another day, Hanson thought, turning to shut the window, as if things would be back to normal.

It was the second time Hanson had seen him walk by. Out on the sidewalk, looking at the house now. Motherfucker with a ratty Afro and the knee-length leather coat he must have bought out of the trunk of a car.

"Just looking," Hanson said to the dog, as the guy on the sidewalk lit a cigarette. "They're always *looking*. Something they can just walk *off* with. A woman with a purse. Maybe some old man they can knock down for his Social Security check, break his hip

and he dies of pneumonia alone in his goddamn bed. So they can buy dope and not know who they are. Lookers. Don't know, *never* knew anything about work or doing something right. Fuckers everywhere after dark, parked in cars, smoke coming out the windows...", he said going through the doorway where he turned and looked back at the dog.

"I'll be right back."

"Hey," Hanson called. "You," pushing through the screen door, as the guy was walking away. "Come're."

"You looking for somebody, my man?" Hanson said, walking up on him. "You lost? New in town?"

"Naw, man. I'm..."

"Maybe I can help you find an address."

"I...I'm takin' a *walk*."

"I know what you're doing."

"Say what?"

"What's your name?"

"I...Curtis. My name Curtis."

"Curtis *what*? You got a last name?"

His throat worked like he was going to be sick, choking up his name, "Barr."

"Let's see some I.D."

"I.D.? For a...to take a walk?"

Dana's hammering, at the back of the house, echoed through the neighborhood. Hanson stepped in closer until their chests were almost touching, smelling marijuana smoke and sour sweat, looking him in the eyes.

"You want to show me some I.D.," Hanson said, his eyes *on him* now, "or you want to go to jail?"

"Jail? Man..."

Hanson studied his head like he could split the skin and set his hair on fire with his eyes.

"Always gotta be fuckin' with somebody," he said, bending down and pulling up one leg of his bell-bottoms.

"I mean, I...shit." He unzipped his boot, pulled down his sock, and took out a wallet.

"Photo I.D.," Hanson said.

He peeled off a driver's license, damp with sweat and gave it to Hanson.

"This is expired," Hanson said, holding it with the tips of two fingers. "What's your current address?"

"Fifteen, uh, fifteen. Same as it says there."

Hanson copied the information in the little brown notebook he kept in his hip pocket, and handed the license back.

"Walk somewhere else. I don't want to see you on this block anymore."

"You telling me...?"

"That's right. Not on this block. A friend of mine lives in that house," Hanson said, nodding toward it.

"Don't even *look* at it. Look at me. If anything happens to his house, I'm gonna come after you. Curtis."

Curtis opened his mouth, his throat working.

"Goodby," Hanson said. "Have a nice day. Sir."

Curtis stumbled over his own feet turning away. Halfway down the block, he glanced back.

"That's right, motherfucker," Hanson whispered to him.

The old dog seemed unconcerned when they put him in the patrol car, as if he had been expecting them all those days and nights alone in the house with the body.

The dog sat up in the back seat of the car, behind the cage, as they drove through the ghetto, past the porno movies and burned-out storefronts, the winos passed out in doorways, junkies wandering, dreamlike, in the sun.

Hanson took the happy face out of his pocket and smiled down at it. "Mister Happy Face says, 'If you keep smiling everything will turn out fine.'"

He pinned it back on his shirt.

"Jesus," he said, gesturing out the window where black and red graffiti spooled along the broken sidewalks and the windows of abandoned stores, "look at this shit. I don't even notice most of the time. And when I do, I wonder what's gonna happen. You know? What's gonna happen next?"

"It's just gonna get worse," Dana said, his eyes on the street.

"Yeah," Hanson said, as they passed a bag lady screaming at the sky, "I know. But *then* what happens?"

"Then it's the end of the world. The cockroaches take over."

Norman, his foot in a cast, was working the desk at North, watching the little TV he'd brought from home. As Hanson reached to open the precinct door, he saw Norman watching him in the silver convex mirror across the hall from the desk. Like all good cops, Norman watched everything, all the time.

"You looking for the animal control office?" Norman said, his back still to them, as they walked in. "This is *North* precinct. We just *shoot* 'em up here," he said, pulling the sawed-off double barrel shotgun from beneath the desk.

Hanson heard the sound of distant helicopters, the unmistakable shudder of Hueys.

"Norman, that broken toe's *got* to be healed by now. I think

you're milking disability," Dana said.

"Hey, the doctor knows best. I'm just a dumb cop."

"Getting paid eleven dollars an hour to watch TV. My tax dollars at work," Hanson said, glancing at the TV.

"What's with the mutt?" Norman said.

"How about taking care of him till end of shift?" Dana said, setting the dog down on the dark red tile.

"He better not shit on the floor."

"If he does, I'll clean it up."

The TV volume was turned down, almost drowned out by radio traffic from North and East precincts. The early news was on, footage of helicopters rising from the American Embassy in Saigon, Vietnamese civilians in white shirts trying to hang onto the skids, dropping back to the roof, one by one, as American soldiers, shadows in the chopper doors, drove rifle butts down on their hands.

Norman pulled himself out of the chair and looked over the counter.

"Fuckin' dog's *blind*," he said.

"I think that's against the Geneva Convention," Hanson said, nodding at the shotgun.

"Over there, *in-country* maybe, but back here in The World you can use it on civilians. No problem. Why don't I call animal control to come and get him?"

"We'll pick him up at the end of the shift."

"Okay. If you think you can handle the desk for a minute—in a professional fucking manner—I'll go see if I can find a blanket for Barko there."

On the TV, a reporter looked into the camera, shouting over the roar of helicopters.

"They been showing that same footage all fucking night," Norman said.

Delicate women on the roof raised their arms to the departing helicopters, the rotor blast tearing at the folds of their silk *ao dai*, whipping their long black hair.

"Shit," Norman said. He punched the TV off with the muzzle of the shotgun and limped out from behind the desk. He bent down to look at the dog, and shook his head. "He's gotta be over a hundred, in dog years."

"Helen's not gonna let me keep that dog. Not with that cat of hers," Dana said as they pulled out of the lot to cover Crane at a family-fight, on the way out to their district. "You on the other hand..."

"I got no use for a dog."

Five Sixty-Two, Crane said over the radio, people screaming in the background, *can you step it up a little?*

Hanson snatched up the mike. "On our way," he said, flipping on the overheads and the siren as Dana blew a red light and accelerated.

"They eat 'em in Hong Kong," he said.

"What?" Dana said, rolling his window up against the siren.

"Dogs. People eat 'em in Hong Kong."

That was the week there were so many moths, millions of them. Word at the precinct was that they swarmed that way only once every seven years, though someone else said it was because of the new nuclear plant up north. A long stretch of road back to the precinct was lined with a monotonous, evenly spaced row of new streetlights, those big brushed aluminum poles that rise, then

bend over the road like a hand on a wrist. The moths covered those lights like bee swarms, throwing themselves at the yellow bulbs again and again until they crippled a wing and fell to the street so that the puddles of light on the asphalt below the streetlights were heaped with thousands of dead and dying moths.

Each time the patrol car passed beneath one of the lights that night, on the way back to the precinct at the end of shift, the tires made a fragile ripping sound, as though the street was still wet with rain. The sweet stink of the old man's corpse hung in Hanson's wool uniform the way cigarette smoke hangs in the hair of the woman you're sleeping with. Dana kept their speed steady, and the ripping sound continued as regularly and softly as breathing.

Hanson adjusted his handcuffs where they dug into the small of his back and looked out at the night. He reached down and touched the leather-bound book he had slipped beneath the seat of the patrol car, the one that showed the earth spinning itself through golden clouds of steam.

"I can take the dog," he said.