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Black Dog

by Janie Reynolds

She was nervous about the future. Terrified by its storm-like, unmapped temperament. She would have preferred to stay rocking, forwards and backwards, feet nailed to the ground. Where no one could find her or her feeble, sluggish figure as it winched and flinched in wanton inertia.

But, even with her eyes closed, Time cavorted ahead, a tunnel vortex of helicoid spirals, luminous within an infinite blackness, sucking her along, in defiance of her physical mass, like a dilapidated morsel of meat, an itinerant within its innards, trapped within its omnipotence, highjacked by another's momentum, back glued to its intestinal walls with the centrifugal force of peristalsis, passively dissolving in hydrochloric acid, her nutrients languidly seeping into the rivers of blood that nourished its vital organs.

And despite her estrangement from the force that drove the world to spin, her hair to grow, and people to meet and fall in love, she knew that, like the worms that crept under the earth and the trees that sucked up water through their roots, she was just another morose automaton, like the hostages living in the flat above, who, suffering from symptoms of Stockholm Syndrome, compulsively banged and thumped and laughed and cried and clinked and clanked at the washing up and whose front door slamming sent shockwaves through her bones as they devoutly shouted amongst themselves about the importance of their comings and goings.

And like the black dog that plodded predictably along the pavement above her basement flat, a miserable pawn of a victim, whose only joys were the sniffing of urine and the opening of its bowels. But who, defenceless against the curse of an owner afflicted by an impetuous inability to stand still, was never granted enough time to complete either process, but, rather, was mercilessly dragged away, mid-flow or mid-movement, throttled within a choker that gouged into its Adam's apple.

She wondered what the joy of an empty bladder might have felt like to the wretched mongrel. Would it have made it smile? Or would it have felt more like a bolt of lightning throughout its whole body? Joy, she had realised, was not something you were born with, but something you had to acquire, and she, herself, had not been able to acquire it. It was like asking a mouthless baby to cry or a baker to make bread without flour.

What she *did* know was that *she* would never feel joy. Because things never changed.

They'd been like this for so long now, how could they?