

the Black

Sketch a picture of this: some stretch of highway, the coast mountain pass from Eureka to the interstate in Oregon, the land of my great grandfather. No traffic; midnight walking downhill, pouring rain into a glass, in the windless, denim jacket, pitch black November night. 1978, with the only light coming from the dim reflection collected by the painted center line. All of one's worldly possessions strapped to the shoulders and hips, forty pounds, to one a week and eighteen years. Is another step possible?

The companion is unseen. There is no talking, just walking. There is no alternative but to walk on, mile after miles, away from Canada, on Grant's Pass. There is no moon, no starlight, no street light, no person – only blackness. Follow the ghost of the center line steadily downhill, in the cold rain.

There comes a rest stop – a picnic table off the road, on a gravel pad. Sit down immediately, opposite the road, facing the forest. The rain stops. The sky above the trees is dark purple, with the black trees dripping in silhouette.

“I'm resting.”

The companion causes the shade of the doberman to sit ten feet away, in front. He whispers. It obeys. The companion makes excuses and walks away into the black.

“ Watch my dog.”

Watch the dog, intensely alert in the darkness, it becomes a perfect reflection. In the rain, shift the weight of the backpack – it taps its' foot on the gravel and whimpers. Acquiesce. Engage the eyes because it is so dark. As the black, staring minutes pass, the beast becomes luminous. Hours to go into a trance, immobile, staring, every move anticipated. Sit, concealed in the darkness, watching every move, every breath – the guard dog.

Swaying begins – gentle circles, the beast sees the rhythm, begins to synchronize, swaying, alert, hours pass.

Slowly to the feet – whimper, tap tap. Shhh... .

Rhythmic, hypnotic, luminescent. Float to the right, standing now, shuffle back, and over, behind the table, to sit then and wait until dawn.

In the softest light of the misty morning, the companion returns. He takes the beast. They leave me alone.

I continue to sit. The power is gone. I am free to read the subtext.