

How To Like It

By Stephen Dobyns

These are the first days of fall. The wind
at evening smells of roads still to be traveled,
while the sound of leaves blowing across the lawns
is like an unsettled feeling in the blood,
the desire to get in a car and just keep driving.
A man and a dog descend their front steps.
The dog says, *Let's go downtown and get crazy drunk.
Let's tip over all the trash cans we can find.*
This is how dogs deal with the prospect of change.
But in his sense of the season, the man is struck
by the oppressiveness of his past, how his memories
which were shifting and fluid have grown more solid
until it seems he can see remembered faces
caught up among the dark places in the trees.
The dog says, *Let's pick up some girls and just
rip off their clothes. Let's dig holes everywhere.*
Above his house, the man notices wisps of cloud
crossing the face of the moon. Like in a movie,
he says to himself, a movie about a person
leaving on a journey. He looks down the street
to the hills outside of town and finds the cut
where the road heads north. He thinks of driving
on that road and the dusty smell of the car
heater, which hasn't been used since last winter.
The dog says, *Let's go down to the diner and sniff
people's legs. Let's stuff ourselves on burgers.*
In the man's mind, the road is empty and dark.
Pine trees press down to the edge of the shoulder,
where the eyes of animals, fixed in his headlights,
shine like small cautions against the night.
Sometimes a passing truck makes his whole car shake.
The dog says, *Let's go to sleep. Let's lie down
by the fire and put our tails over our noses.*
But the man wants to drive all night, crossing
one state line after another, and never stop
until the sun creeps into his rearview mirror.

Then he'll pull over and rest awhile before
starting again, and at dusk he'll crest a hill
and there, filling a valley, will be the lights
of a city entirely new to him.

But the dog says, *Let's just go back inside.*

Let's not do anything tonight. So they
walk back up the sidewalk to the front steps.

How is it possible to want so many things
and still want nothing? The man wants to sleep
and wants to hit his head again and again
against a wall. Why is it all so difficult?

But the dog says, *Let's go make a sandwich.*

Let's make the tallest sandwich anyone's ever seen.

And that's what they do and that's where the man's
wife finds him, staring into the refrigerator
as if into the place where the answers are kept –
the ones telling why you get up in the morning
and how it is possible to sleep at night,
answers to what comes next and how to like it.