

CLARE WELSH

Love, or Grieving a Beast

In the heat, on the hardwood floor, I lay
naked with an electric fan blowing hair in my mouth
and my wolfdog drooling on my thigh.
She has bitten my father
and I am proud because he deserved it. Tomorrow,
my parents will *put her down*—notice how
language grows vague as it approaches
murder, but I am a child in America in the time of the Great
Pretending, and this is love despite the horror that is
explaining horror. I am in the woods because I am running away.
I am on a raft on the Mississippi river
because it is stronger than guns. The river dampens denim
to a deeper blue. The river killed Jeff Buckley
but it didn't mean it. In an abandoned church I burn,
but can't abandon,
a Bible. I scavenge the pages, read it
time. A book of leaves. A house
on a hill where the bones of a beast
rise up when it rains. I like taxidermy
because I don't like burying bodies. At the bar
of dead deer, I'm finally ready for love.
Love plays me at pool, scratches the cue ball,
and it's nothing like poisoning
a pet on a clean silver table and everything
like a hand out a car window. I am a child in America
and allowed in bars because no one here can separate liquor
from a miracle, am allowed
in cars because no one here can separate growing up
from driving away. I drive away in the key of Bb minor
which, in 1682, the composer

Marc-Antoine Charpentier described as
obscure and terrible. Love rings rude.

A crude palm of pennies, loose tobacco, and keys,
America is not my kingdom, but the dirty snow
where I find you looking so fine, just like that,
holding an animal you won't kill.