

The Night of the Dog      A Sestina

The bullet entered my brain the same time as it did the dog's.  
It's been lodged there for years and lives  
Within the book and volume of my mind – a sound  
With the power to resonate for years. The shot  
Entered and refused to leave, eyeing a wound  
Which echoes beyond one dark night.

The small town road stretched long and wide into that night.  
I noticed the pepper trees and stars. No one noticed the dog  
Until the sharp pummel of brakes left an obscene wound  
With only one response understood where guns were part of lives  
For country men who jumped from utes and shot  
Animals unable to work. Best finish it off if it's not sound.

I had no knowledge of how life worked out west, only heard the sound  
Of my city girl's voice accepting his mother's invitation for that night;  
Conscious of my newcomer status and rounded vowels; until the shot  
Made me stop and drop a split second after the dog.  
A shocking moment in a life which has shaped our lives,  
When I knew that this man had wound

Himself around my heart but all I saw was the wound  
His action made and all I heard was the sound  
Of the street emptying itself of noise, as two lives  
Bled in the heat and dust and blood in the black of night.  
Wordless, we scraped the dead dog  
From the road and drove to dinner. Shot.

My smug assurance was lost in a man's single mercy shot.  
He assessed my tears with amusement, not meaning to wound.  
Raised with guns racked and locked upright and a working dog,  
Came of age before he learnt how a bullet can sound  
Its round assault. It disrupts and reverberates long after a single night  
And finds a place in the place where memory lives.

We came to the house which held their lives;  
In her welcome I saw she'd heard the same gunshot  
Years before. She brought me in from the night,  
Drew me in a silent embrace to heal the wound  
She'd carried herself; not felt by men and with a sound  
That's made when damage is done. We were that dog.

Women know how lives are altered by the legacy of such a wound  
And the crisis of memory. A shot in the dark and the awful sound  
Which marked an initiation that Night of the Dog.