

Inner City

The way a man lets his dog
strip the bark off a young tree
and the children of that man
break branch after branch
till the naked trunk of the thing
stands, a bare stump . . .

Who's to knock their heads together
now that the bobby on the beat
is part of the gang you meet at night
roaming the city's streets,
brazen in his uniform,
smiling through clenched teeth?

That same dog has slipped its leash
stripping a child's flesh
off her soft bones. Who can stop it?
Here's the police just when needed.
They tie a rope around its neck
(the dog's) cutting its steamy breath.

The children report the attack
as something miraculous. One says
he heard the girl's bones crack.
Another liked how the dog wagged
throughout. A third bragged
that after a while it was hard

to tell the colour of the ground
from the girl's smooth brown:
both were dug-up, both were raw;
both were under English law.
The children grow up feeling like dogs
they worship stumps for gods.

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