

Kim - by Frank Farrelly

My father bought her from a farmer who wanted rid of her.
My mother fumed. What was he thinking?
He smiled. She was for us, and company for her
when she was alone all day in that draughty old house,
the six of us at school.

For months the pup ran riot, ripped sandals, jumpers, shirts,
chewed the carpet, the door of the shed when she was in heat.
One morning she nicked the postman's ankle and my father
beat her hard. She cowered, in seconds licked his hand
—they say a dog always forgives. My mother stroked her
on the forehead, like she was calming a child.

Every Friday he brought a sheep's head home
from the butcher's, gouged out the eyes, peeled off
the wool, cracked it open like an Easter egg. Her mouth
wide as an alligator's, crunching the hard jawbone.

Some Saturdays he drove us out to Hodson Bay
to show us why she was a retriever; we watched
her golden body easing through the water like a seal,
the thrown stick in her teeth like a magic wand.

Years later, when I became a secret smoker, she was my alibi.
'I'll be back soon, just taking Kim for a walk.'

Time moved on. She grew old, heavy, her legs gave up,
frequent visits to the vet. She dozed in the kitchen,
starting sometimes in her dreams. My father built
a wooden cart to wheel her in and out.

One day when I came home from college
he was in the garden, sleeves rolled up, still as a soldier,
standing beside a mound of clay. I remember
the scent of rosemary, glint of sunlight on the shovel,
him, gathering up the empty cart, carrying it away.