

LINDA BESNER

## Bill Milne

Even in winter, he couldn't drive without the windows down;  
*it was like being inside a dog*  
 a friend marvelled after Bill dropped us off,  
     chugged up the hill again, willing dogsbody,  
 for a box of glasses, extra claret—  
     tidbits for my mother's dinner party; then dogtrotted  
 off whistling to chop us down a Christmas tree,  
     tow it home on a dogsled.

At the party, dizzy with beef stew and red wine,  
     fancying himself competing again with dogfaces  
 at a barndance from the forties, he grabbed my hands  
     and swung me in a circle, hotdogging.  
*Now lift your feet*, he commanded,  
     seventy years fragile, but I, hangdog,  
 hating to disappoint him, stayed grounded.  
     Fetched coffee, sugarcubes, some such boondoggle.

They followed him everywhere. Orkney, Cayley, Lance, Jello:  
     what perfect teeth endogamy  
 can engender, what galumphing size.  
     Called while lying doggo  
 under the table, Ork bolting upright  
     would fling the whole thing over like a strawdog,  
 run to Bill for biscuits, who never let him down.  
     Now that blond beast's a dogie  
 lost in the herd, bewildered. Mom and Ina  
     sitting with Ruth in their kitchen, dogroses  
 in a vase, a mailbox full of sympathy cards.

*I worried about what I'd do with Bill when the dogs  
died. I never thought of the other way around,  
she says, and they watch the sundogs  
Flame from the window crystals; their liverspots darkened overnight.  
The first to go.*