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Lefty

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Lefty

His eyes cannot believe
what his legs are doing. Off the leash
he is stotting on this winter beach,
springing in place like a lamb, now bucking,
flexing the way years ago I watched
two fawns as they climbed Rose's Hill
ranging against each other in fifteen
minutes of play. Lefty the leftover,
last of his litter, whom I brought home
in trepidation because of that,
though the sheen on his coat
and a brainy light in his eyes
promised that he might learn not to mess
in the wrong places and chew up shoes,
and grow with no hurry into a border collie,
a sheep dog full of agreeable surprises,
who might be like Patches was,
knowing when the blueberries are ripe
and raking an arm of the bush
for a mouthful. I have witnesses to that,
and how if you told Finnbarr it was raining,
he'd return from the door to his denning place
under the coffee table. If his tail swiped
a sheet of paper off that table,
he'd pick it off the floor and bring it to me
with a sorry eye, his mouth as useful as
an opposable thumb. And once when I flicked
his nose with a finger in play, he took my hand
as lightly as a nurse might and looked me
in the eye to say, *Please don't do that again.*

Lefty, Lefticus maximus, Leftospirosis,
McLefcowitz, we have worked our way
around mutual distrust. You were worth
more than one trip up that old cart road
in western Maine, far from the doggy Walmarts
and the shepherd with a BS in Nantucket Studies.
If you will give me a throaty hoot after dinner
like Magnus does, or watch birds out the window
a half hour at a time, we will do the beach early
for sunups and to flush the occasional fox
from the tall grass, and hear the wing-thresh
of a pair of tundra swans even before
we see them. When I do the math it's clear
you may be my last dog: last night
I couldn't recall who wrote *The Bothie of
Tober-na-Vuolich*. Finally it came to me
and I said "Arthur Hugh Clough" out loud,
glad to have dodged another blown fuse.
You looked up from the rug, your eyes
agreeing, *Yes, that's it. That's it.*