

KELSEY ANDREWS

## The Hour for Petting Dogs

Comes in the afternoon  
when the health care worker  
who doesn't like dogs  
is upstairs with Dad,  
and my only job is to keep our Lab  
calm downstairs while they  
do his exercises. She has eyes  
so brown the colour bleeds  
outside the iris,  
and she looks me in the eye  
more than any dog I've had  
as though to say  
here we are,  
two animals together  
in a house where someone  
doesn't like dogs  
and what can we do about that  
but pet, and be petted,  
and surely it will be alright.

She has a slight bump on the back  
of her skull and I start there,  
fingers swirling and then up  
and down either side.  
My hand slides along the top of her head  
then fondles the ears  
which are silkier and smell finer  
than any other part.  
My index gentles between her eyes,  
then is joined by the middle finger  
for short sharp strokes of her upper muzzle.  
Every time I lose interest  
she turns one eye upon me  
until I start again.

We talk in the quiet dusty downstairs  
with our fingers and our brow  
of the difficulty of being unable to protect  
Dad from exercises, and cancer in general,  
and old age particularly,  
and say, each of us, that there is nothing to do  
but pet, and be petted,  
and maybe it will be alright.