

Dog

Not my idea, the beasts at home
of our own blood loud enough
and hungry, a growing problem
destined for the top shelves. Yet off
to the pound we go, and of course
we find something, a pumpkin puff
of poodle mutt marked *last day*,
up and up on its back stick-legs,
the grin we learn only later
is pain, a rib broken. While
we wait, on comes the quaintest
snuff film about death and bad owners,
the bodies everywhere, a dog
and cat massacre. Our kids' eyes
distend like goldfish—all that blood—
but they don't get it, how the life
escapes, how the work is to keep
it in, a finger for each vent,
a face to show the questioner
who stands now tall in front of us,
who wants to know, *Are you ready?*