

Taking the lead

The man at the vets' started it.
He was last in, leading a lumpy beige dog
you wouldn't look at them twice—
except perhaps to say they were alike—
and except for the lead attaching them—
big white words on red: one of us is single.

One of us is single.
We thought about it.
Hoped it was the dog.
Nobody offered him a seat
in case it might be construed
as leading one of them on.
Talk turned to the weather.

But the idea caught fire.
In the next days and weeks
in roads and byways
lanes and avenues
pathways, and most of all the park,
dog walkers sported slogans:

One of us is a dog.
One of us doesn't know which he is.
One of us is a good boy.
One of us is on heat.
Both of us wag our tails when excited.

One of us has a big wet tongue.

Leads entwined, entangled.
Animated conversations started.
Even a woman with a guinea pig
trotted very slowly round the park
with a long thin lead saying
one of us wants a good time.

Then there was a park take over.
Rottweilers and Alsatians arrived, panting.
One of us is a heavy breather.
One of us has a knife.
One of us is on crack.
One of us will kill you.

The park emptied. A few leads
fluttered from tree branches in protest.
One of us is frightened.
One of us is angry.
One of us wishes you would leave.
One of us will do something.

There was a meeting in the community centre.
Some of us won't stand for it.
One of us has a black belt in karate.
One of us has a hidden camera.

All of us will band together.
All of us will overcome.

One of us by one of us
the dog-walkers re-emerged
leads silent, empty
but with a fresh spring in the step,
heads lifted high, glossy hair,
a new meeting of eyes.

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