

Forgive Me, Augustine,

for these are times of white and tufty heat,
poplars spiking the asthmatic air,
a miracle of two crows shitting

with sniper-scope accuracy between
the smile bead and tear strip of my Coke,
slit to divine the still, black gunk.

Here was the omen, unspeakably brief:
*the dog has less than a dog day left
beside you.* Prayer stalled to tragedy.

It was awful, Augustine. I hated you
for seeing God in the hound's stigmata,
cherishing details. How she dropped flat

as a slug by the oscillating fan
shaking its head to sigh out the length
it took to forget my voice, her name,

deaf as a crazed god trapped in muscle
I baptised her with tears and tap water
but the heat curled deep in her ribcage

and lo came the vet on the retired landline
begging me to lay on hands and coax
the long-departed soul back to the flesh.

Not a chance. Her white coat paled whiter.
Imagine that, Augustine. Like the night
the heavens turn apocalyptic,

the moon too bright to couch upon the world.
Three days later there were signs,
a wolf-shaped puddle on the sanctified rug

shadowing the time when I held faith
or tufts of fur like alms in the backroom,
her supper of tripe and kibble, untouched.

Seek neither cleanliness nor godliness.
Block out the sun. Troll-like, let me turn
to stony grief. I dream the vet's questions:

*Was God a girl? Did you bless her bowl?
Her essence – was it stored on a microchip?
In a puddle, did she recognise herself?*

*Flea-like, would she latch to the unwashed,
sniffing out their private fantasies?
Was prayer answered by a paw's extension?*

Merciless, did she snatch a trout's eye?

*How many rotations before she slept?
Was it her job to mutely keep the house?*

Augustine, I want to open the blinds
and windows in your sincere confidence,
witness fur clumps swept up by the breath

of God to grace the air like poplar seeds
and end confession with a damp *amen*
on a saintly day as long and white as robes

but my heart is ash inside a sealed urn.
You have seen God; I have seen his absence.
You preach; I work this animal cry,

chewed up in grief like a rawhide crosier.

When We Moved to Morecambe

Big and dipping, summer hung over us.
The guinea pigs rolled like candyfloss

in their cone-shaped hutches:
Donna, Dixie, Daisy and poor Darcy

who wore the roundness of a hamster
when her cheek bloated up like a pouch

of dolly mix. It proved an abscess.
I thought of piñatas and water balloons,

grapes necked back, tablets of wine,
the syringe we used to mosquito suck

her atomic measure of antibiotics,
less than a wooden doll imagines

in her teacup, an unfair cut of a raindrop.
No medicine hampered her passing

through the Jolly Tube with its twist
of colour cut from cardboard.

I wanted to scream with my hands up
or to test her death with wet spinach

but my grief locked me in motion
like the ghost train's buzz bar.

Then the shoebox tomb. The lawnwalk,
the weight of a consolation prize,

the constellations set like guillotines,
half-guineas, the sun and other stars.