Sometimes, in a moment, the mind gets a rush
like a train entering and leaving a short tunnel
like the first time I saw a bomb going off

the excruciating silence, then the strange barking of dogs
before the pavement began to tremble under your feet
and the buildings shuddered, followed by a deafening bang
the crazy sound of sirens, walls imploding, screams
dust billowing out like sea clouds
the million flapping shredded office blinds—

and I didn’t realise until much later
that I was bleeding, streaming down my face
it all seemed so impersonal
that I never thought of blaming anyone

or like the rush of speed in a girlfriend’s flat in Amsterdam
that left me sick and seeing not beauty but the ugliness of things
of how man can corrupt what is natural in life
of how a girl’s face can seem ravaged with death—

and then I looked beyond the level of the Belfast street
to the God carved mountains, and listened to each blade of grass
as it grew towards the sun, and was filled with the understanding,
that eternity is only a second.

ACE BOGGESS

“How Can We Distinguish What We Know from What We Believe?”

[question asked by John Van Kirk]

when the candy-eyed clown tumbles down
a flight of stairs & doesn’t rise again
when the Sacred Clowns of the Navajo speak
inside their masks
when laughter oh what have we?
when did it become so hard to say
goodbye image goodbye illusion
hello matter & understanding?
when I say God we loved his serious work
but not his comedies—
that should’ve been a clue
when I say it was Prof. Plum in the Conservatory
with a bottle of Jack
when one of us repeats the joke
still funny though we get it wrong
when we open the closet door &
find a broom where skeletons should be
when we dance if we dance
slipping past the darkness for a while
when we clap at the scene of an accident
when we walk away smiling
when we ask
when we know the answer &
ever need to feel this way again

“Why Are You Asking Me?”
[question asked by Kirk Judd]

You passed me a mason jar, moonshine-brimmed,
when we gathered with other writers around a fire,
the many of us toasting the end of a festival day.
I was pushing my first book, & you were everywhere:
poet of mountains & dirt under the fingernails,
police sketch artist drafting West Virginia faces—
all the usual suspects. I don’t remember the shine’s taste
which says a lot about its qualities. What I recall is fire scent
like dust on an old TV & how I ended up in a cottage bed,
kissing the tight, tiny backs of two women,
each into the other, sharing the passion of their liquor light
with me. One’s lips tasted of grapes & menthol,
the other’s like cinnamon toast. Where are those
moonshine moments now? Where is the hospitality
of Cedar Lakes, the hills & hollows (hollers,
as we say)? I ask because you know
the stories: where swans glide across a mirror,
who lived & later died in the haunted cabin,
why our midnights furnish their own fog.
You’ve stepped from each rock to every other.
You’ve faltered. You have found your way. So,
tell me, where among cicadas rasping might we
make our music, holiest with resounding hollow chords
(or is that also *holler* chords)? Where, to whom, do I pass the jar? I ask because you tell it best, staring the world in its eyes while I look down, reading all the white space on a page.

“**What About You Is Original?**”

*[question asked by Marged Dudek]*

It’s not the sitting at a table’s equator
writing poems by junk light,
not that ape-walk down an alley
to avoid the wrong crowd
or the right one. No,
it’s not the punches I took to the face—
all men know what it’s like
to be beaten down (it’s like
falling off a high porch
with instant replay). Still,
there’s something, some glimmer
of me-in-the-world that separates itself
from me-of-the-world:
I the feeder fish escaping
the maw of a whale,
I asleep among the poppies
dreaming adventure,
I the stage magician’s greatest trick
before he died—a conjuring
for which there’s no solution,
no logic path to pierce the illusion,
so even the I that’s aware of me
can’t find the wires
lifting me off the floor.

“**Is Forgiveness Real?**”

*[question asked by Andrea Fekete]*

We forgive the winter snow its blinding
as we curse beneath our frozen breath.
We forgive traffic patterns,
small red cars moving in & out
at dangerous angles,
never think of these again.
We forgive ourselves the candy bar,
the dropped football in gym class,
the tricksters’ lies
we tell about our lives.
We are holy men of minor trivia,
absolving a stubbed toe
as we ignore bones in the sack,
a cup of antifreeze left outside,
the second Iraq war.
What we fear we can’t forgive,
we won’t, so walk away.
We’d need a priest massive enough
to orbit Earth,
his lips stretched into a dish
beaming indulgences
over the grave of humanity.

HALF-INFLATED ALUMINUM BALLOON

skips drunkenly
at the shoulder
a directionless toad
a pup bounding
toward birds
in the tallest tree
it can’t get lift
despite a fine diet
of helium wind
snowflakes barely
heavier than nothing
painted on each side

in grade school we
loosed the full ones
for an experiment
a flock of them
a gaggle
a murder
sent them en masse
with messages
hello mostly
my name is…
no one wrote back
the sky is a wide sea
for little bottles
I like to think some kids
wrote *help me*
*Scott loves Beverly*
or *if train X*
*leaves Philadelphia*…
I imagine notes
fluttering down
like burning leaves
escaping a fire
their vessels
deflated
hopeless

there’s no message
from the 1970s here
just a knight errant
on its erratic quest
its heart isn’t in it
as it searches
for a place to settle
itself among the weeds

**To the River**

if I have forgotten the river
walk me to its edge
let the diamonds on its skin
blind me with their fortunes
I will squeeze your hand
I’ll tell you stories
the one about my grandfather
as silent in memory
as the Ohio & the one
about a girl that asked me
to save her although she didn’t &
I didn’t & the moment
dragged itself off
oh these cells of images
the river draws out of me
when I have spent too long
where forgetting is easiest
among traffic lights
in the massive concrete emptiness