The Pups in the Boghole

I poured the milk into the cup
of hot black tea until the surface
clouded over and lightened,
with coils of steam,
like the genie of memory
rising out from the uncorked
bottle of the forgotten.

The turf-brown tea settled
at the brim of the cup, silent
as the guilty bog-water
that brimmed the wide boghole
I had walked away from,
many years ago, when I was a child.

It was a deep boghole, a blind eye,
beside a bare oak tree whose branches,
like exposed nerve endings, signposted
its fatal spot in the middle
of the vast gouged-out turf-fields.

As I returned, that day,
to Uncle Frank's pub on the sea-road,
through the coconut scent
of the yellow whin bushes,
the palms of my hands were still
stinging, reddened, branded
by the weight and the coarse
fabric of the turf-sack

and all around was the echoing
liquid call of the curlew
marking out the hollow tent
of the sky – the amphitheatre
that had been listening all along
to the puppy-yelps muffled
in the turf-sack, and my footsteps
dragging them to the boghole.

The mute colosseum
of the firmament gasped
as the tossed sack whirred
through the air, hit
the bull's eye of the boghole,
bobbed, seemed to float,
then slowly sank.

As I turned and fled
my footsteps were lighter
but the naivety of my bravery
weighed down my outsized
wellington boots with a heavier
tread – in my pocket was the fifty

pence piece, the Judas-coin
Uncle Frank had given me
to do the man's job he didn't
have time to do, and overhead,
the crowded audience of the sky
darkened in disbelief.

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As I sit here, years later, and lift
the teacup to my lips, I realise
I have been bringing sacks
to that boghole ever since –

the pups of what I cannot
reveal to anyone, pushing
the visage of their cave-art paws
out through the sacking,

and in my head I can still hear
Uncle Frank's *well-greased till*
shoot open like a bullet
and hit home with a ring.

And I still see,
beside the boghole,
on the wizened trunk
of that burnt oak tree,

the eye of a twisted knot
staring out like the drowned.