

Lucifer Among the Missing

Where in the world is the devil now?
Perhaps out in the cherry tree
sitting on a limb
eating *reesy cups* again.

What a strange time
when he's not seen clearly,
you can hardly call his name,
and now, after he's troubled
and taunted you so in the past,
surely he's the best one to blame.

Then why wouldn't he speak his mind,
tell the whole world right where he is,
instead of acting as though
he's no account at all,
he did nothing out of line,
and you,
you are the only one who did.

The Price of a Dog

My neighbor grins as he says
the dog was running down the road
on a sunny autumn day.
He beams to make me smile
when all I want is to be riled
that my dog kept on running. Or did he?

Perhaps someone slowed down
on the side of the road,
smiled at him, eased him into an SUV
—just snatched him away,
perhaps a woman
who saw my dog was happy
and she wanted her children happy
so she eased him into her vehicle
then stealthily crept on down the road.
Yet the question stands
what price would someone have to pay
for the taking of a dog
on a sunny autumn day.

Or does that neighbor speak awry
because in truth he'd fired at my dog
as he was running through the forest
looking the color of a deer
and my neighbor couldn't help himself
in that rush of hunter fervor?
Maybe my dog was running
through the forest chasing a squirrel
—my dog on the run on the kill,
and how is my dog unlike the man,
that feverish neighboring man?

Or could it be
my neighbor saw the woman
ease the dog into the SUV
but refuses to reveal the truth?
Maybe he knows the woman:
she paid him to tell where she might find
a happy dog the color of a deer
—one that runs through the forest
and leaps over stray bullets fired from rifles
perhaps by vehement neighbors on the kill.

My neighbor smiles as though
he knows my thoughts yet he would never say.
Maybe he hid him away in his garage
along with the vehicle he'd concealed
for the woman he knows so well,
hoping my dog wouldn't bark so I'd never guess
the truth about him and that woman,
the stark truth of neighbors and men and women
and SUVs and rifles and lies and thievery
and deer being shot down like animals
in the forest at the edge of my land
just beyond where we stand—
animals smiling on a sunny autumn day.

Just a Goat

Christmas was born on Christmas Eve
and on Christmas day she passed away.
A miracle of birth to eyes of one
who hadn't grown up on a farm,
Christmas had slid out of Guida and lay in the hay,
all legs, blood and goo.

Guida cleaned her up nicely alongside her twin,
who in short time was on his feet,
but not Christmas, not on that day.

On Christmas morning
I brought her from the stall to the porch,
nursed her with sips of her mama's milk.
With all my might I would see her through,
and try was all she needed to do.
The more she tried, the more I wept.
So weak that she couldn't stand,
she looked to me for strength.

I spent the day with her
with plans to keep her alive,
to let her know how much I would mourn.
I cared for her because she was real
and I'd seen her come into my world,
a spirit in a vulnerable lovely kid.
I cared for her because she was there,
there on my new little mountain farm.

She was just a goat, and she was
my love and passion on a Christmas day.

I AM! in Shades of the Subjunctive

"How did you end up with a name like that?"
Had it come to fruition that which burned in their minds,
you just wouldn't be. You'd have merely become
a glimmer molded in flash fiction, a quick tale of *woe is we*
or some other fashion of faint literary labor,
so you deemed yourself I AM!

Had they gone on to undo their deed,
you wouldn't be spoken of in first person
with a bold exclamation mark
but in self-centered confessional voice
only to trail off in a trickle of ellipses . . .
all from the inept exercise
of clumsy conjugational skills.

Yet how fearless you are in present tense,
standing strong in real conditional form,
because you were not nullified, you are here

in attendance of the great *I am*—
as winning as the verb *to be*,
aware that you are much more
than just the consequence of their bungling,
and you'll be damned to let anyone annul you now.

Theology

An uncle once told me
angels sit on the four corners of the earth,
and I try to imagine that
when I look into the eyes of my cat;
I know why we needn't use words—
she can see my thoughts,
yet had she taken up tracing
which are good and which are evil
she too would be tossed
from her peace in paradise.