

Skull Junction

Way back in the woods
at a trail junction west of Tangletown,
sits a steer's skull on a post,
whose horns point the way—
hard to miss this grim trail marker—
a chickadee lands on an eye socket
and sings.

Coyotes have left tracks all around,
but this skull is of no interest to them—
not much meat left on its bones—
whoever put it here made sure
I won't lose my way—
a weird sense of humor.
It reminds me of heads on pikes,
though I wasn't around to see
people decapitated,
for patting the wrong buttocks,
or writing the truth about their monarch.

We like to think we've come a long way
from executioners and heads stuck on sticks,
far more civilized than those coyotes,
who may eat stray sheep
in the woods above Tangletown—
but what about Jamal,
the journalist dismembered
for writing articles a crown prince disliked?
So is impaling heads on pikes any worse,
than building nuclear weapons,
or carpet bombing a country
until its children starve,
or killing me for writing about you?

The sun's getting low,
but I can still make it from Skull Junction down to Tangletown,
then walk back home on East Hill Road,
where there are usually no bombs or heads on pikes.

Light Years

Tonight I don't need my tent,
the breeze off Little Talbot is so warm,
that I'll sleep under the sky.
Over the sea Perseus meteors flare then fade,
the waning moon is a thin teacup,
faint enough that I can see
stars far out in the galaxy,
their glow from light years ago.

What happens here on Earth,
the grass I sleep on,
a bomb that exploded somewhere today,
pines silhouetted against the moon,
my friend, a poet who loved
to watch stars and birds—
all this will be long gone in the time
it takes light to reach those stars.

Ordinary Things

I remember these little things—
the curve of you thumbnail,
the way you pull on your sweater,
your voice when you talk to our dog,
so understanding, firm yet soft,
crayons and chalk you save
for visiting children,
your latest book
with notes stuffed in its pages,
your voice when you answer the phone,
rising an octave
if it's your sister or our daughter,
your cup of tea left on the table,
that starfish on top of the Christmas tree,
a photo of you years ago in a park,
pack slung over one shoulder,
hair sparkling in the sun,
the way your hair still falls,
all your shoes and boots lined up in the hall,
your earrings scattered atop your dresser,
your water bottle left half full in the car
next to a pair of mittens—
these little things,
I remember.

Resurrection

We roll along Interstate 90 Pennsylvania,
with views to vineyards and across Lake Erie,
Ontario's shore barely visible,
white cross next to highway, paint peeling,
a few *Trump 2020* signs—
red, white and blue gone pale over winter,
Daffodils and forsythia bloom
a week after Passover and Easter,
signs for guns, pepper spray, adult stores—
and Jesus—
but he hasn't shown up for a long time,
and might wonder
what sort of resurrection we're expecting.
But tulips bloom, grapevines leaf out,
soon they'll make wine—
though they'll have to wait for grapes,
since Jesus won't be around yet
to turn Erie's water into wine.

Lazlo's Afternoon

He lies on a raft which drifts on the pond,
first east, then west, defying its anchor.
The boy peers over the edge, watches brook trout,
fins shimmering. Once in a while a fish
swims to the surface, eats a floating fly.
He wants to cut this rope, float free from his anchor,
but for now
he watches fish.
Dragonflies hover over, daring the trout,
afternoon sun pierces water,
shines on fish, magnifying them,
tricking him into thinking they're bigger
than they are.
And Lazlo wants to be larger,
to swim away.
First ask what you'll do with that freedom.
Will it be better than
a summer afternoon,
sun,
drifting on a raft?