

Ghosts

There are no ghosts
When I think of your face
Walk where you walked.

There is no haunting
When I remember your lightless eyes
Meeting mine for a moment
Under half-closed lids
On that last day.

There is no hole
 No abyss
 No want
 No rent
 No absence
In the tearing of you
 From my heart.

There is no grave.
Only ashes in a carved oaken box
And vials for your family
To wear around their necks.

I have none of these.

To ashes you have returned
The sun of your beauty
A dim memory
The dust of dreams
I need to remember
It all was real.

Like a ghost
 Your arms around me
Return to me again and again.
It would do me well
To remember
I am the one
 Living.

Sugar Skulls

And a year or two on, you find yourself thinking of her or you read of someone else's pain, and you realize that you cannot go there any more, you have passed through that tunnel, and it is shut to you. Yet still, you understand this pain of theirs, for it is a journey you are making, and the memory is fresh. You warn others of the milestone aches, and then you watch as they endure each birthday, each holiday, and they in turn will warn the next. But no one will listen, because it is a trip that you have to take yourself, the scenery is different for everyone, and the journey never ends. You are not immune, you have not completed your journey. A simple sentence can bring the tears again, and certainly, hearing of someone else's pain will bring it fresh, but it is not a place that you inhabit any more. Those dark days, if you only could be sure they are done. And then that person you loved, they can be remembered, and it will be without bitterness, without guilt, and you will be free to live as they did not, and speak their name out loud.

Home décor

I've been seeing a lot of death lately

Wide lipless grins

With flowers painted on

And the catalog copy reads

"Playful!"

And I wonder

Do they even know

The meaning of these

Flower-covered skulls?

I observe the flippancy

I have observed the memory

I have written cards to the monks

In the abbey at St. John's

To pray for the soul of my uncle

It would have meant something to him.

I wish that here, we could picnic on the grave

Of those we loved,

But alas, November is too cold for picnics

At this latitude.

I settle for a walk among the leaves,

Grey skies and grey stones.

And decide

That my tombstone shall be a bench.

Bad Advice

They don't tell you
How to watch somebody
Dying in front
of your eyes.

Whoever 'they' are,
They should nudge you,
Shouldn't they,
So you are paying attention
For the important bits?

They should hold your face
Between their hands and say,
Look, this is it.

Tell her you love her;
Know this is the last hug
Nothing else is more important
Than this moment
Before the people you love
are gone.

Stay as long as you can
On that day she
feels good
Go see her on her
Last lucid day
Beat the door down
If you have to.

Ask if you can have
That picture of the two of you
While she can still decide
Before it disappears
Off her nightstand.

Ask if you can have
a vial of her ashes
If there's enough
To go around.

Because you know
There will be no place to mourn
Her family will fracture
And split apart
And you won't speak her name.

Keep yourself together
But don't be afraid to cry
You'll have tears to spare
There will be many more later.
Let her cry too.

They don't tell you
Her family may be hostile
You never thought
Her husband was
the jealous type.

They don't tell you
Three years later
You may still
Cry in the dark –
But let yourself do it.

They tell you to
Keep it inside.

Don't listen to them.
Let it out.
Let it out.

Hunger

I want my nights
To twinkle
I want my dark
To thrum.

I want deep dark,
Rich in all it holds
So corporeal
I can grab it -
In my hand.

Wrap my fingers
Around it
Take a piece

Bring it to my face
Breathe in the scent
Deep dew or rain
Things long hidden
Secrets in the corners

And then,
Take a bite.