Looking at Skulls

The first skull I saw
  gleamed from a stereoscope
in Grandma’s front room.

The scene was a Mideast catacomb,
  Jerusalem, perhaps, or Babylon;
Grandma favored the Bible lands.

In three scoped dimensions
  two shadowy orbs leered at me
from a knob of chalky bone.

I scrambled for the next card—
  benign camels crossing the desert
or the somber stillness of Golgotha,

anything to squelch that deep vacancy.

Now, all these years later,
  I’ve met Hamlet and others
who do not turn from skulls;

I’ve lost Grandma
  whose hidden remains still comfort,
whose skull is surely beautiful.

And I’ve made peace
  with my own scaffolding—
femur, tibia, clavicle—

  gliding me through this life
  like a fine ghost ship,
at sea with lofty captain

  intent on solid grace,
    yet content with the usual gear:
a nose, an ear or two, eyes,
  the accoutrements of face.

—Jeri McCormick