

**The Empty Space Between Words**  
(for Meghan)

My daughter worries over the spaces  
between words,  
and is anxious to fill them.

Square wooden letters are strewn on the floor.  
We combine them  
spelling her name, our address, the-tree-is-tall.  
Yet she worries over those spaces.  
I search for an explanation—

memories flood in instead.  
The years with Newmont mining  
and long hikes  
through central Nevada,  
searching for gold with geologists,  
exploring rocky hills  
covered with gnarled brush  
and the smell of sage.

Abandoned towns that still bear names:  
Bootstrap, Jarbidge, Rawhide,  
Tuscarora, Deeth.  
Places for men  
in dusty boots  
who break rock with handpicks, penetrate earth  
with drill rigs and bulldozers—  
without respect, without offer  
of marriage, or even commitment.

Men who pass the tracks of cougar and deer,  
who kick away the shed skin of snakes  
and antlers of deer,  
without wonder, seeking no messages,  
wishing only they had a gun.  
I was comfortable among them.

Then, one day,  
crawling over the crest of Lone Butte,  
I peer over the edge of the world  
and see the great valley below

waiting like a womb,  
a mountain range thirty miles beyond, and another,  
ninety miles, stretching like millenia  
over the vast empty spaces. Instantly I knew:

**The Empty Space Between Words**  
(for Meghan)

The long decades between saints are too much.  
We no longer expect to hear,  
out of those silent spaces,  
a word that will bless.

I walked away that day  
to search the hollow places  
of the world, to arrive here, where I say  
it's okay, Meghan,  
that space needs to be there.

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2017