

### **Ghost Town (Tenebrae)**

One inhabitant remains, though multitudes  
Once kept him company. They're gone now,  
While crumbling buildings, long abandoned,  
Meld with dust and sage.

Miners of gold once tunneled  
Deep underground, where coursed the rich veins  
Of dreams that built a world. Buildings rose,  
Children played, choirs sang.

Then dreams slowly faded, while candles  
That lit the long tunnels went out, one by one.  
The keepers of flame lamented, then wept,  
As their children drifted from home.

The multitudes dwell now on the surface,  
Far away, building dream worlds  
That crackle, then quickly dissipate.  
An alien furnace burns in their chest.

Voices of the fore-mothers and fathers  
Echo softly in the hollow tunnels,  
Burning long, like embers  
In a night now unknown and feared.

The inhabitant brings forth one last candle  
From a hidden place deep down,  
Raises it high atop a hill, hoping his children,  
Catching a glimpse, will draw nigh.

### **Juan de La Cruz, Can You Hear Me?**

The angry despair of sitting, paralyzed,  
on the bridge from desert to heaven,  
unable to cross over, or go back.

Yet we know, don't we,  
that others have passed this way.  
Did they endure the dark night,  
or get crushed?

The dust of bones reveals much:  
soil for weeds that, occasionally  
put forth a flower.

Other men, not having dared  
the journey, point to the flower  
saying, "fruit of the holy ones."  
They do not see the dust of bones  
throbbing still with pain,  
know the despair  
of infinite eros that finds no lover,  
see the arms, wrists, fingers  
stretched outward  
holding nothing.

They do not see how the cosmos aches  
through the ashes of lovers.

This is lost to lesser men, Juan de la Cruz,  
who see your ecstasy but not your dying.

Perhaps you, Juan de la Cruz,  
crossed over, leaving this desert behind.  
Or is your dust too, but soil for weeds?

**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 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.

## **The Life of an Introvert**

Desert plants are diffident.  
They do not flourish with gusto  
like the mountain lily;  
it is not their way.  
Their intensity is interior, sculpted  
by the marriage of severity and longing.

Accustomed to long drought  
and intimate with thirst,  
some grow thorns for defense.  
They are difficult to approach:  
reluctant, isolate, guarded.  
Propose friendship tentatively.

Their roots go deep, in search of  
nourishment that is stored, not exuded.  
Nourishment that is given freely  
to the earnest traveler.  
Accept what fruit there is,  
in spite of their hesitant reserve.

Now and then, a flower blooms  
in the desert. Lay beside it awhile, at dawn,  
and gaze upward as it kisses, for a moment,  
the soft morning sky.