

To Virginia City, Words from a Mislaid Miner

Autumn Goddard

You are built on bones.
Stone bones of the mountain,
wood bones of the mine shafts,
chalk bones of the miners.

We were sent down into the Oubliette,
seeking stars in the mountain.
Shackled to our candles and railcars,
lured by wages.
The gold that was silver. Glory that was
Evanescent.

Some thought
that Saint Mary could save us,
But that spire was a portcullis.
The iron bars mimicked those in saloons.
Who could blame us for getting
lost on the way every Sunday morning?

We drank in Buckets of Blood.
We danced in the butcher's kitchen.
We could afford to dance.
We could afford to drink.

But not as much as Those Tycoons,
The Millionaires, The Comstock Kings.
They stole the stars. They stole the gold.
They wore shiny shoes and they bartered
with our souls.

And when the blast or the fire did come,
they whisked us away from the morning
sun. To Boothill they carried my brothers
in arms. They sorted their graves
by their flesh, their faith, or their sins.

But I'm still here. In the dark I'm still here.
My only company is the ghostly tings
of chains. Or are those pickaxes?

Who will find my bones?