

POETRY

Borax

Ken Raines

The sand that blows along the bed
of the Amargosa waves and shirrs
and cleans as well as water. It scours
the tatters left uneaten by birds,

erodes the burnished dead—
the ones who dropped, accounts unsettled,
before they clawed their way across
this sour, alkali Styx.

When you descended with your mules
below the level of the sea,
this river only ran with heat,
a burning wind between the banks.

The team strained against the grade
from mine to railhead and deadhead back.
You blinked against the salted sting
that slipped into your eyes.

And when you paused to wipe your brow
or felt a trickle down your spine,
perhaps you stooped to watch the bones
as they blew to dust and understood

that every load you hauled would seep
and tumble back, become again
a freight of salty relics leached
from basalt piles of congealed fire.