Tree; Tremble

Before: *terroir*
the wine-rich drink of earth
I have wanted to bend down
and taste holy in the mineral
and also, *terror* as a kind of joy
towering beyond study.
I send up my questions on a pulley
and they float away.
Between every sentence and its story
is a door
Between movement and air
a departure
Between prayer and sleep
is a loneliness so tidy
it doubles as contentment
Between every form and its arc
ripples a call from its dark center.
shallow shutter swept
(what music folds between)
lapping at the shore of your feet

shaped by the sound
of the thing knocking against itself
in the living air.

When we moved to the desert

we had to learn its vocabulary:
paloverde, cholla,
ocotillo like vertebrae
trying to lie down in the dirt.
We had to dodge tumbleweeds
under the overpass
measure the days in gradients of fire.
It's a dry heat
said the bleached bones walking the high desert.
Rattlesnake, coachwhip, red racer.
Slid skins curled in the garage.
Widow eggs netted inside the bells
of the wind chimes.
We removed cactus needles with duct tape,
alligator lizards from our kitchen,
we had to blackout the rooms.
In sheets, then blankets, wood blinds,
our efforts ever weighted,
we orchestrated an eclipse
to harness the available dark,
stashed it in closets
and fed it monstrously of coal
and the emptiness of vases.
We left a Cinderella pumpkin
on the brick walk and it disappeared
in less than a season.

Stole the water first, the seeds
papered to eyelids, the shape
drew toward its center, shrunk
down to a skin that too withered away
until there were only the bones
of a lizard who had hunkered
beneath its stagecoach frame.

Jennifer K. Sweeney

Jennifer K. Sweeney is the author of three poetry collections: *Little Spells* (New Issues Press, 2015); *How to Live on Bread and Music*, which received the James Laughlin Award, the Perugia Press Prize and a nomination for the Poets' Prize; and *Salt Memory*. She is a recipient of the Pushcart Prize, among other awards.