

SIXFOLD

Fall Poetry Contest Entry

Four Poems From Mexico:

Not Exactly

Foreigners

Float

We Are Rain and the Rain

Not Exactly

—*Taller Servicio Automotivo Rafael Teniente*

You have seen the mechanic. No, you haven't. You have seen his son, Rafi, who knew nothing. Then you saw your pickup: out by the fence, between a taxi and police car, hood open, jacked high on its side. Just to replace a loose timing chain? No, not exactly. The engine's in pieces—spark plugs and wiring heaped on the cab, covers on a fender, oil pan on the ground; bolts, screws, nuts piled all over the place. Something else has happened. Something other than the timing chain has loosened, warped, torqued, rattled away. Perhaps it was the valves. Where are the valves? Or were they? What exactly do they do, or did? Perhaps it was nothing. Perhaps Teniente needed simply to look. To see if anything else had occurred—to those valves, and the guides, and the rods and camshaft, and the tiny bearings that bob up and down over and under the springs. When Aaron Chigbrow disassembles an engine (he showed me once) there are hundreds of these things, sometimes chipped or corroded, yet often—when you wipe off the oil, as smooth as the day they were born. But a bad cylinder can drive you mad, trying to even out scratches and gouges, with air-driven dremels, sapphire bits, micrometers, steel wool rubbed by hand; to get back the compression, the purr of the rockers, like a fine-tuned Maserati the first time it takes off. How my Toyota's motor used to sound, two weeks ago. When I knew, at least, where it was.

Foreigners

—*Café Organica, S. Miguel de Allende*

I was gazing at the blackboard
with the specials today, it was only
ten a.m., too early for lunch, though

the large butch woman with
stark facial hair and Sacramento State
was knocking down a salad, a giant
enchilada, plus a bowl of beans
her girlfriend hadn't touched, they

were talking intently about a she
from Portland, I wasn't that focused,
besides their thing was private, and

Lara at the register
had let her long hair down
and was speaking with Santos, Santos

was wearing a bright pink polo
with a little alligator
that wiggled as she laughed

and someone had put sunflowers
in the umber vases, like Vincent Van Gogh,
with a bouquet on each table of tiny
bright carnations, each petal striped
with different colors, just like

the ones inside a cast glass sphere
on Nanna's cocktail table, that sat
by her lighter and her silver cigarettes

when Dad took our family
back to New York, all night from Denver
on the vistadome Zephyr
to pick up the brand new Volkswagen bus.

No one in Kansas on Route Thirty-six
had ever seen a Microbus before
and ran to the fences, stared from
the tractors, dropped their hay bales
simply to gape,

and here was I, in the back
with the seats reversed, my kid sisters
Betsy, Deedee, two-year-old Ali

and we all were playing
the license plate game, waiting
for a drive-in like Lula's Dairy Dream
or the next rhymed, eight-sign
Burma Shave riddle, chocolate

milkshakes always were the best
on this trip, burgers in wax paper
dripping mustard as we drove

and everyone, including Dad
and Mummy, had a dark brown
moustache, a thick German accent

and no one wiped theirs off
until the next Texaco.

Float

Do you remember how you felt
yesterday, when the giant hot-air balloon
swooshed down in front of your hotel window
behind the equally giant palm tree?

How it hissed, belched flame—suddenly
got bigger, encompassing the whole tree.
And then, without prediction, how it
rose, receded and shrank, little by little
until it was a satellite tracked by the sun,
finally a gum wrapper, blowing away.

Do you remember how you felt
this morning at Rafael Teniente's lot,
finding your truck jacked-up by the fence,

its gas tank on the ground, a cylindrical part
dangling from a line. Was that
a fuel pump, the thing that pumps the gas?
Was that a float, that tells your gauge
how much? And when his daughter Eva,
ripe to marry, waiting her chance

showed you, yes, the float, in her hands
with its tiny mechanism, the contacts
that were bad, how lovely the apparatus
looked, the twelve brass ingots like notches
of a zipper, so beautifully calibrated
as she moved the sensor up and down.

Do you remember the elephant
on the cover of your child's writing book?
How light in the photo, how round;
yet how massive, heavy, as it trumpets,
bellows, crushes trees and cars,
affirms the earth with no need to fly.

How the float was just a canister
that bobbed and fell on the tides of its fuel.
How day rose with the balloon, then
broke live. How the tank in the dirt
was a kind of death. How an elephant,
without trying, each year circles the sun.

How Eva's hands, soaked black
with motor oil, opened, trembling,
shot up to grasp the rope

dropping from the sky.

We Are Rain and the Rain

does not discount us. It doesn't put its garbage
in a black plastic bag dogs will rip apart.
It doesn't buy toothpaste at Espino's, just
to see María, six months pregnant. The rain

has been pregnant for many months, many times
and all of them are beautiful. My sister Deeds'
first child was such, everywhere this baby
broadcast over highways, cities fraught with fire,

in the Chico kennel every stray and starveling
gifted Haley as a Chevron gifts hoses to its pumps;
Deedee fueling passing engines, Haley's
smile, her wisps of hair and dancing gurgle tiny

hands at every moment of a party Haley at my
sister's open breast, the rain, how soft, expansive
for us all the rain adores the cucumber the sand
fleas at Los Cocos the waitress' panty hose the

baby rain named Haley tapping at my window
roses sudden asters blooming all across the balcony,
the rain does not remove us from our slippers
or the metal eyelets of a silver vinyl tarp

lashed across a taco cart dripping into midnight
just outside San Marcos Market two men wet
in canvas trousers pitched sombreros woven
for this flavor while my sister glows

in every taxi Haley's promised garden, every
petal spritzing the handmade wrought-iron rail, rain
does not contain itself or still sunlight after passing
women with the juicer in the hotel kitchen

laughing, sizzling bacon and their boiling beans
forever this aroma, we are rain the coffee
perks, burbles, my rain will not forget you
once your rain moves on.