

For SIXFOLD APRIL 2024

THREE POEMS FROM MEXICO

Hail, Columbus!

Come, discover enchanting
 Colonia Santa Julia
 for the very first time!

You'll walk to a stop you had mistaken.

You'll take the wrong bus
to Ripley's Burger House. You'll head
 down Orizaba, instead of the Ancha,

 block after block, mile after mile
 as the buildings get less tended,
the neighborhoods rougher. Finally

you will turn, at the last *barrio*,
 into a narrow *calle*, and skirt
 the falling walls along the city's edge.

Which will take some time.
Since someone's left a Nissan parked
 sideways in the road.

And, as the bus edges out,
 You will become We—

As two kids in a Plymouth
 are coming towards us fast—

And we won't be going forward
or backwards for a while.

For all will take some yelling,
 weeping, pounding on a door.
 A high-amped flash police car

that can't get through. With some
 very pissed-off parents yanking
with a winch. And tear-filled hugs

 because no one's losing blood.

A boy hawking cokes. Another with Tecate.
And some women with tamales—

Walkway

—Café La Palapa, San Miguel Allende

Across from this table with its sunny plaid cloth,
the low bamboo fence, breezing macaws
and parrots, fluorescent Huichol fish,
beyond the dwarf palmetto and wide-leaf elephant plant,
slow-circling fans of the canvas tent,
beyond the parquet brick, diners' dozing dogs
and churr of conversation, the kitchen's chop, frizz
and muffled boombox rock; beyond the long head table
where Carla sits, as usual, after thirteen years, after
Christian's death, back with her old flame Bob; where
Carla smokes her Salems, welcomes her guests as always
and will just four days more, beyond her rising costs
and shrinking clientele. Silas, the basket vendor,
seven on each arm, weaving through the chairs,
Lito, the sombrero man, a dozen on his head, tipping
all twelve brims to each seated patron; old Salvador
with peaches, wobbling in with his cane, his battered
zinc bucket, spilling as much as he sells;
beyond the spew and shock
of passing traffic, past Blanca
at the entrance, her *come-hither* smile, Blanca,
who'll take over, greeting, seating, serving; across
the gravel driveway, beside Bob's parked Honda:
a thick mauve, stucco wall. With a townhouse
rising above it. A passionate red to the street,
a soothing moss green to the side. At the rear
a higher apartment, brilliant ochre, its lemon balcony

fading into coral, one last canary room

and distant above all, a spiral silver walkway
winding its stairs to the roof. Then up, out of sight

into the menthol blue.

Flamenco!

You want to be here again.

Because of this piano. For
the man who can't stop playing

the Strauss and Chopin
and the hot Scott Joplin. For the veal

which could be chicken, drenched
in chile, and the *sopa* fizzing
with tiny bubbles, and the woman

Wei Shin, next table,
with fire bomb eyes.

She speaks excited Spanish
as if she were born here,
she smokes straight Camels

and you don't care. She's young,
intent, turned away, writing
in a notebook with a cheap Bic pen

as the pianist takes off into *Cities
of Spain*, and *Heartbreak in Seville*;
and then the steaming beans,

New Orleans Rags, the Caribbean
cook clangs a gong and shouts *Olé!*

The vaulted ceilings soar
in their gleaming rows of brick, across
the accordions squeezed in the *nichos*

above the blinking lanterns, lines
of colored wheels, silver streamers,
paper flags and frogs

over this woman, her inkjet hair,
her red T-shirt with it's four sun
faces and *Fly Me To the Moon*

the pianist is playing, the trebled
water swishing in her clear plastic

bottle, as a thousand ribbons dangle,

spill, sway, like long distance calls

from a bar in Hong Kong, this piano's
urgent cadence, climbing

and descending, like the plans
you'd made, the drive to Chiapas,
before the sudden swerve

of a double semi-tanker, the sudden
crash of your red Tacoma truck;

before your surgeon's nephew

who reclaims wrecks, takes gashes
from the body, cave-ins
from the heart, who matches

the paint to its first complexion

when the steak is rare, just off
the grill, and the beer uncapped
for that first thirsty instant, and they

give you limes, the engine roars

as swash from the stairs the guitarists
rock in, as Wei Shin leaps up, knocks
down her chair, stomps to the floor

in her swirling skirt, her spike-heeled
boots, and circles the room

in a stalk, a frenzy, in a no-hold
full-freight hissing *salsa howl*

that only this piano, the hand-carved
tables, dark *pasilla* chiles, the siren-
piercing traffic, cymbals, *tambor*—

that only this piano, this woman,
your next breath know.