

For SIXFOLD, July 2017

Five Poems From Two Sides of the Border

Stationary Front

Red Jetta

Aluna's Puzzle

Burri-Carmina, Family Style Buffet

He Has Not Picked Up a Magazine

Stationary Front

—*Rio Arriba, New Mexico*

The men ahead herd cattle
in front of a truck, horse
trailer behind. Rain, early; much
too early, early March; a heat
from California, heat
that feels like anger spreading
in the belly, or a sadness
for the future, for these heifers
huddle-packing one another
in a block of undulating mud, two
hundred legs across the asphalt
pushed against the shoulder.
I'm looking for an intuition.
My hands around a memory—
a wheel that turns the wheels
around this curve, covered
with dung, dogs, cows; men
who need to move, fast, move
large, put parts together; the way
you'd pick up hamburger
and slap it into shape: hand,
heart, man, moon, a cake
of compressed longing
forced across a pan. A dark
hand from Sonora, slick
rope, smeared chaps, saddled
on a roan. A woman
in the pickup, hair pulled-back,
sucking on a cigarette, smoke
against the glass. A fog
that cuts the vision
to shredded lengths of road, meat
pressed into meat, hooves,
barks, brakes, pistons, dirt.
Is this what you prayed for?
All the signs are brown.

Red Jetta

—Rio Arriba, New Mexico

In the breach a man waits, holding,
not sure of the line, not aware
of where or why a water pipe
has broken, under the bathroom

or under the house, he dreams
of rain often, and his ex still
in bed, her freckled forehead glowing,
her closed Irish eyes; it's July

in two locations, one year
by the river in the house of crossing
willows, rented at the bridge
from the Tewa reservation, just below

a highway to the Hiroshima bomb,
between a proposal and an incompleting
marriage, between two paintings
for a failed exhibition, hardpack road

splitting two directions, hers in retreat
south along the Rio, his into the mesas
north near Tres Piedras, sleeping bag
and easel in a green Dodge Aspen

that would soon lose its drive-shaft,
U-joints, alternator ruptured
in a sluice-rock arroyo, two trucks
to follow, decades of repair, though

now he hardly hears the leaking
fissure, rust-cracked iron; he swears
it's the whisper in her long red hair,
loose and restless as the day they met

at the Pink Adobe bar, with a pint
of Bushmill's, her scarlet Jetta;
archeology is history buried
and unearthed, or broken

and scattered, like the Neolithic
birdpoints that surface in the dirt
after monsoon flood—a sudden
heavy deluge that turns each rut

to a sea of sucking muck. You don't
go far without sinking down. And I don't
want a guy, Fiona once said, who hasn't
been run over at least a time or two.

Aluna's Puzzle

—San Miguel Allende, Guanajuato

When I arrived, Aluna was watching the baby.

The baby's name was Aldo. Perched on a cushion in his pillowed port-a-seat, Aldo was so recent he barely reached the table with the top of his head.

Aluna had to stand on her wooden chair, crane her neck over the back, just to see his face.

Since she now was grown, Aldo was a puzzle, as she remembered once being to herself. For sure, she still was a puzzle, but a different one. Almost

six, and even more, three months now in Mexico: *that* was something to really think about.

As she looked at Aldo, strapped in that strange bag, all he did, without a blink or move of his head, was stare—directly at her eyes. Once in a while

he wiggled his hands. So *that's* how it was, she thought, how *she* was, when she was just like Aldo. She just

observed. It wasn't a puzzle that asked you to think. She just looked around. And now that she remembered, she couldn't remember thinking at all.

Burri-Carina, Family Style Buffet

—San Miguel Allende, Guanajuato

When you walk in
to this open concrete room
with its white tiled walls, steel beam girders
a line of press-block windows
with industrial glass, you will not

feel nostalgia. You'll feel the rumble
of traffic, gravel trucks and tankers, a Flecha Amarilla
with sixty all-night seats
screeching-in, packed,
to the depot next door. Feel squeal-shot

Suzukis, spitting cracked rock, the spew
of smoking Harleys—catcalls, whistles,
the shouts of passing bloods
as they hawk their chicks. You'll hear sizzling

Cuban Salsa, Pop Latino Rap, whooping Janis
Joplin, bootleg Leonard Cohen and Bad Moon Rising
from the max-amp corner speakers
next to Jesus on a cross. Jesus with his hands out
above you as you sit

at a red formica table,
on a candy red molded plywood chair,
with a half-wilted corn-palm in a pastel
plastic pot, a lone salt shaker, a quart
squeeze bottle of orange hot sauce
from a plant in Mazatlán,

across from a steam line, register and counter;
across from two young women
in pink sequined polos
serving the entrees—two señoritas
with hot-pink winks and watermelon grins

asking your pleasure, stirring *guisados*,
spooning your selection, passing dish to dish,
lifting each lid, putting it back.
A simple play, a light one: Which rice or beans,
stew or meat, which garnish
do you choose?

In a Samuel Beckett play, the props are just two chairs.

This isn't Samuel Beckett. It's an old warehouse
one door from a depot.

And it's Valentine's Day—

with giant, inflated, spinning
rose-red hearts; dozens
of flame-glass spheres
strung like Christmas from the girders
in a shimmer of nylon strings;

It's New Year's Day, Cinco de Mayo, it's 4th of July—
It's any day you want

when you're just off a bus
in this other country,
with a song in your head, a story
to write, a painting on your mind;
and these two sparkling girls
smiling, wide-eyed, staring, for the moment
just at you.

He Has Not Picked Up a Magazine

—Rio Arriba, New Mexico

There are dozens on the table. He's spent
all spring in Mexico. Now he lifts up one.

Most have riveting photos, moving stories—the
dwarf elk of Maui, steaming Reykjavik, the newly

published diaries of Khalil Gibran. Not one
carries one of his poems. There is nothing here

in Spanish. He will not taste *pollo en adobada*
or *cochinilla con pasilla* for another nine months.

Or be with Araceli—her laughter in the kitchen,
her hair swept in a bun, as she hugs his chest and

shoulders with her yellow rubber gloves. The bells
won't chime each morning over the hillside city,

every rooftop garden bursting into color. Nine
Months. Nine Months. Gorgeous Araceli. He

lets the magazine drop. He hasn't opened a page.