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On Obregón

Greg Pape

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closed down like old umbrellas
all along the drive,
and your grandmother's voice from Florida
speaking of the weather there
as if the sun were some huge stone
rolled against the door of death
to hold it shut.
Here birds blaze briefly
at the window; a fox has died
under the deck, and we haul it away
our breath condensing into cartoon balloons
but ours have no words in them.
Even the trees seem no more than kindling—
so many dry sticks, and your grandmother's voice
crackling along the wire just now
like a brush fire soon to be put out.

On Obregón / Greg Pape

Across the street
from the only cottonwood tree
on the Avenida Obregón
there is a white burro
harnessed to a cart
that has stood still
for over a decade.
Between the long white ears,
a gaudy paper flower.
Beneath the slung belly, between
the four patient legs, a bucket
that now and then a man
empties in the gutter.

All day, the flashing
of gold watches, the thin rustle
of money (like the flower
between the burro's ears), the traffic
in baskets and plaster saints

the blaring staccato of trumpets
the thumping of the guitarrón,
all the jive and sorrow
of two or three languages.
All day the tourists eat and pay.

Children laugh
and slap the burro's flanks.
Flies ride the flicking ridges
of his ears. It's all the same.
The sun moves slow on the burro's back
as he stares through the exhaust
of failing trucks at the great cottonwood
with which he shares, in his way,
the dignity of a rooted life.

When Fire Meets Water / Martha Clark

When I was seventeen
my uncle gave me
three coins from China,
old, with a hole
in the middle of each one.
I learned to throw them six times
and construct a hexagram from their falling.
Each day I would close my eyes
and throw them, reading
Chinese lore to comprehend their meaning.

I learned about the lake upon the mountain,
how the superior man
must keep his mind humble and free,
that he might be receptive
to good advice.

* * *

I had a master who lived
above a purple head shop
selling hash pipes and fluorescent posters.