

EL NORTE

-- *Homage to Mexican emigrants* --

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Translation into English by Philip Garrison

In a Oaxacan village

Your corn stalks and bean

Vines went limp.

Soil worn out, cracked,

They keeled over.

In backcountry Michoacán, your voice

Of corn and chile pinto drowned.

Sleepwalking Purépecha

Water became Lake Pátzcuaro.

In ancient Tenochtitlán

Imperial regulation

Turned your gods into Knights

Templar, and neighborhoods

Into fairs. Gold vessels became

Spanish piggy banks.

And the green splendor of the land?

Ribbon-bearing deeds

Of sale.

Under that shifty Mexican sky

Hunger and desperation

Left tracks,
An unfinished history
Of missing daily bread.
It flung wide open a door
To emigrant life
And intemperate settings.

Flat huaraches
On steep roads.
Dry and diseased,
You crossed the Arizona desert,
Rivers and canals
Resisting like cold kisses.

Face to face with future ironies,
With the Migra coiled to strike,
Your willpower never gives
Up. Never.

The light of volcanoes is a badge
On your chest. Overwhelmed
With heat and anguish, tripping
Over stones and words,
You follow the signals of silence
In each boulder. On the border
Of each new pain, step
By step, your geography
Is all crossroads.