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Crossing the Border

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Crossing the Border

Barbara Armbruster

Through a rusty-toothed
gate that squealed
in misery
with every turning,
we crossed the border.

A street dog
passed with us
nipples long
from recent birth
nose working
the urine-scented gutters
to glean a corner
of the crowded market.

We muttered
no dinero
to children
already versed
in street arithmetic.
measuring with hard eyes
our pampered bodies
the strength
of our resistance.

A man with wizened
leather skin,
his burro tricked up
like a zebra,
called out lady
called me mama
seeing my big
noisy family
trailing out behind me
using that soft
voice of deference
that comes from
service and from
anger buried deep.

We bargained:
cutting our eyes
in feigned amazement
at offers, counter-offers
neither
willing to be
thought a fool.