City of Cloud and Stone

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City of Cloud and Stone

Phillip Barron

It’s just me and the bag of lemons
we bought from her,
selling citrus and eggshell
pomegranate passionfruit
with the white caviar inside
outside the UNESCO zone
while her children climbed
through bars and played
hide&seek
behind porcelain zebra
legs. The little one on her back,
tucked in colorful cloth,
dreamed of Atahualpa’s new empire
and the peaceful era

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1 Phillip Barron has taught philosophy at the University of North Carolina and now teaches poetry and digital humanities at the University of California, Davis. He is a member of the Squaw Valley Community of Writers. “City of Cloud and Stone” was written in 2010 while the poet lived in Quito, Ecuador.
to which all Inca warriors felt entitled
after years of brotherly war.

The idea of a city forms in flashes
of neon,
sodium vapor street lights,
screching jet engines,
oval swimming pools,
and empty embassies
through the half-open window.

A sister climbs on her brother's shoulders,
and with scrofulous hands he tosses her
three of the six balls they juggle
at stoplight changes
for change. Her uncut hair
loops back on itself,
wrapped in a pale blue ribbon.

The light flickers green
across the bus lines,
meridians of this equatorial
city. Rain crawls out from hiding
just as I pay the driver,
its gathering water
tells stories in the streets.