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Cottonwood in Autumn

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TWO/POEMS OF NEW MEXICO

TO A RAIN-CLOUD

Long dark hair,
Out of the rain-cloud falling, ravelled over the desert there,
Drift not near this mountain,
Oh, of him beware!
He is old, cold and cruel, caring but for the skylands,
His breath is vast and cold.
He will change your rain to hail, scatter you into whiteness
Where his slopes unfold.
Rain-cloud, keep away from mountains, spread upon the valleys
Your full drops, to fill the river-bed and glisten in our corn,
Do not seek the spruces or the aspens,
Shun the peaks and their black crags of scorn.
But if you must near them, trail down these darkening canyons
Seeking there your rest;
And bring with you at afternoon a new-made rainbow,
Like a crown in black hair gleaming; that for us is best.

COTTONWOOD IN AUTUMN

Coronado, I am sure you never knew,
You who rode hither, to find and lose your dream of gold,
Anything like this tree;
Mailed in its glowing scales, fresh-dazzling frosty daylight,
Full-armored in the sun.
You could not stop to mark
How over sage-grey uplands
It lifts its challenge, as the mountains stand
Blue, ashen heads beyond, to watch it flutter
Up to the light and scatter
Its prodigal power before the flame will fade.
Then, leathery-brown, the light gone out of them,
These self-same leaves hang dense, a drooping mass of tatters,
Through which grey breezes stir,
Like the hands of palsied beggars shivering in the sun.

JOHN GOULD FLETCHER