

LC Gutierrez

Habanos

Mixto, mezcla, mestizaje. Stay on the tracks,
The never intersection of two parallel lines.

Miami International: Can I help you please?
Sí, ponme un cheeseburger y una coca-cola.

No borders, just the rising tide
and the receding line of a burning habano cigar.

60 years without a Cuban
fat and brown and stinky.

Go West! Key West!
Give me your Niña, your Pinta
and your USS Maine.
Let the smoke rings fly!

90 miles as the gull flies, straight
as a line from Hemingway's reel
boats and rafts and and tight
packed sacks of reefer.
A million expats waiting
out the detritus of Castro's wake.

Tio Enrique always had one,
glowing orange on the drag
smoldering and acrid
down to the butt.
Chortling through ocher clouds.
Must have had a middleman.

Lived to be a hundred.
A splattering of moles
down the sides of his cheeks;
archipelagos along fleshy laugh-lines.
Buddha in a guayabera

Tchoupitoulas 1998

“If a guy really likes you here he gives you a gun,”
observed Mary since moving to New Orleans.
In “The Most Romantic City in America”
love beats against barred windows of shotgun doubles,
and palsied virtues of erstwhile debutants wilt before
the slurring charms of the sons of trial lawyers,
cocaine moonlight, Sinatra their jukebox accomplice.
Cats claw vines chew lead-painted dead mansions,
where oak tree roots slow-crack rippled sidewalks.
High on Louisiana Avenue, under the concrete trauma
of the C.J. Peete housing project a young black dude
cocks his proud head in pure performance, croons
and raps a melodic promise to his girlfriend.
Legs two long marvels of satiny brown heaven,
she, in another universe, would be called princess.
In a bar on St. Peter, a scrawny teenager,
on his chin a wispy tuft of pampered fuzz,
feels through a barrier of denim, for the first time,
the full swell of another man’s cock.
In a basement apartment, not far from the river,
a grad-student strains his dreams and strokes himself.
Feet pressing the window of an eighty-nine Cutlass
parked by the lakeside. Two perfect naked feet,
her legs two long marvels of satiny brown heaven.
And a gun pops on the levee by the river,
(someone’s welcome blood blotted out by the banks)
and the student squints out through the bars
beyond the window, wipes the pane, and studies silence.
His hand drops holding nothing to his side.

Dem People

When the crack epidemic
finger-spread through the city like fissures

racing through a going dam(n). It left boys.
That one, maybe 16, eyes hard-hazed,

and, lordy, a 9 millimeter pointed at my head,
2 in the afternoon, birds chirping, raking

those fucking fall leaves' return, the
heavy oak limbs shading his innocence.

Innocence. A 9 millimeter pointed at my mind.
Nothin. Either one of us going as numb

as the other, straight through. As though we'd done
the dance before, like images on a screen.

"Give it up." A 9 millimeter pointed at my conscience.
I'm a teacher. Does he see it?

Sleight of hand. This one's up, the other slow to pocket,
only the cash, I toss the wallet down. Whose terms?

A 9 millimeter pointed at my pride.
More broken contracts. He's gone, I chase.

A revolver in the console of my van, "Call the cops!"
A few steps and I'm an action hero. "Why?"

"Armed robbery", I tell the neighbor. Shakes his head,
scratches his balls and grunts: "Dem people..."

Can You Own a Possum in Louisiana?

Depends.

I've learned to craft questions
that skirt around clear answers.

Google has helped.

People usually chip in.

I'm a skilled interviewer
averting yes-sir, no-sirs.

Cycling on blue Virginia hills I find
a man crouched over shooting carrots
still as a jackrabbit
ready to spring. Quiet
and lanky like the pines
staked around his house.

"Is this the way..." I ask

"to get back to town?"

"Some do"

"Some do"

he languidly admits.

"And there's another way?"

I press on.

"Back the way you came from"

he waves a little to the past.

True for any problem.

Look to where it started.

Questions circling answers.

Ripples around tossed stones.