

Cuba Libre

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1

Havana:
serving humanity
with cigars and smiles
and its certain stink

and brilliantly surprised flashes
in back alleys
where the coffee-bean children
play marbles
in the dust of palaces –

some sort of Spain
crumbling on their lips;
limbs still twitching
the long chains to Africa,

the iron now rusted
into music
and dancing.

2

Malecon:
the long stretch
where evening falls
as easily as mansions
and lovers gather
to sport their secret sweat.

3

Tobacco leaves
hung out to dry for the westerning sun,
their spent mahogany wafers
curling for an African thigh
and bongos,
smouldering;
an ember-lit of smoke
scribing the blue
and distance:
voicing it.

4

Turtle-iquitous: little tracks tapping out small infinities of sand to the sea. Mother sea:
softly cooing all tongues to her one tongue, patient-urging all her Ulysses: come home.

5

Cuba is a tense
in the imperative:
'Be languid', says the sun.

'And so I am, so I am': the trumpet,
sweet as a pineapple amongst the febrile palms.
Coconuts and bongo-nuts
banging out all the sun's stations across the sea;

and the jaw-bone of the sea
laughing itself into the bleached,
crystal-weighty shell sand -
the disinterested bone-stuff of Davy Jones
and soul-mates shipwrecked and ringing
in the clear waters
as crystal rings.

While the sun plays rhombuses
lightly about the conch
scuttling from one outlook
to another outlook
in the out-of-reach deep.

'Dive!' says Cuba.

6

Our toes digging in the sand
for neglected pirates and treasures,
the prickled burs and fag-butts –

with a bit of spittle I could join them,
make a raft and sail us out to where
the setting sun makes its fuzzy islands –

your voice enough to fill our sails;
my tongue sweet enough for a tiller.
And if we got hungry

the sea would give us coconuts
and the sharp fish. All we need is toes,
our heat-tricked eyes

and for the sun to hold on
to the islands of its dying
for just a moment more.

Maybe the last Indian – *Taino* –

forming out of the sea's sun, rising,
 wrapping himself in the limp banana leaves
 of *no gracias* cigars, shoeing the soft sands
 with naked toes
 until their trapped and grainy suns
 burn all but blisters from the beach,
 until the slops have sailed the coconuts
 all the way away,

and the yellow sails are full
 of a round wind, of a wind
 that rounds all the island,
 gold-rounded island
 coffee-ground from mountains
 that wept their tears slaving
 and falling like fruit falling
 ripe and sweetly, like insurrection,
 betrayal, revolution, museums

and all the colonial palaces in dust;
 the coffee-grounds mixed with it;
 the old chains mixed with it,
 and what remains of Europe and Africa
 twisting the night to the pulse
 of a black bean soup,
 where *no lo mosquito* and the wan birds
 plump up the bushes like fruit
 to startle centipedes
 out of nocturne
 leaving the night fit only for stars
 and horizontal clouds on horizons lit
 by the sun's slow dying,

maybe then
 the last Indian goes
 on the gold-long road.

If I did not swim where the sun rises
 I would not know how to breathe

If I did not swim where the dying sun is
 I would not know how to leave