

Virgil Suárez



Haircut

H A V A N A , C I R C A 1 9 6 9

My father took me to Manolo's Barbershop
in Calabazar, not too far from *El Volcán*,
the market, *el almacén*, as my father called it.

He always promised to take me in for candy,
or a *papalote* (kite) if I behaved during the hair
cut. But each time I stopped on the hard stool,

propped up against the broken magenta cushion
of the barber's chair, this chrome-plated
chair that cried when it turned, made me cringe,

in front this wall-sized mirror which made
the room larger, spookier than it really was,
my father's face crooked, his pencil-thin mustache.

I looked at the black combs floating in blue
disinfectant liquid, the bottles of cologne,
lather, the shaving kits, sharp scissors —

all the different jars lined up like broken
teeth on the formica counters. When Manolo
pulled the leather tongue-like strop, sharpened

the straight razor (it always set my teeth on edge),
and pushed my head down, I knew I'd never
be the same — that cold-snap of a razor's sharp

edge, how if I moved, it'd slice open my skin,
and often, too often in fact, I did get a little cut
behind my ear, at the nape of my neck. A trickle

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Calabash

of blood no one mentioned but I saw on the towel
Manolo placed, warm and damp, against my skin.
"Está ya," he'd say, *"Todo bien."* And I'd look

at the mirror, at the absence of my hair, my scalp
so baby-powder-clean, smooth, white. Always a new
me, that cropped feeling, a trickle of blood left

on the barbershop floor next to the clumps of hair,
mine, other children, men whose lives, like mine,
shone like a new haircut in this land of cracked mirrors.

