

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.

