

POETRY

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Two Poems

1. Thingamajig

For years after I arrived in the United States
from Spain, and to Madrid from Havana, Cuba,

I would not know words like this one,
English words that sound like a type of dance,

and I mention it here because I think each time
of my grandfather's farm, the barn in San Pablo,

the granary, some type of mill where water ran,
but you had to pump it first, where old tractor

parts hung from the rafters like the carcasses
of dead animals. Crows and sparrows nested

in the holes of stirrups, saddle mounts, crooks
and crannies, and the smell of molasses, o sweet

it was, thick, rich, and we fed it to the pigs
mixed in with *palmiche*, seeds from the palms

that grew around the house. The chickens nested
here, brooded until the chicks hatched. I found

milk bottles from ancient times, or so I thought,
and the toads hopped in too when the rains came,

thundered on the tin roof like spooked horses.
Frogs croaked from their hiding places. Engine parts

shone in the ray of light that snuck in through cracks,
these broken boards on the walls. I came here

to have adventures, I knew, to get away from other
cousins who were bigger and meaner than I was,

then when I heard my grandmother calling, I sat
atop the broken-down tractor and pretended it

was a tank. It could have easily been a tank
from the Bay of Pigs invasion, sure, and the parachute

billowed over the entrance was a man-of-war, a membrane
from an angel's wing, a white cone of moondreams?

Some things, a world gone ablaze with their uselessness,
So many still unnamed, so many not forgotten, not yet.

2. The Myth of *Las Fincas*

whenever my father got together
with friends in the house in Los Angeles,
he'd laugh at the other Cuban men

who claimed Castro had taken all their
property in 1959 when the Revolution
triumphed, the sugar mills, the thousands

upon thousands of heads of cattle,
their *fincas*, these golden farms
their Gallego grandparents came

from Spain to settle, own and run,
 where royal palm trees lined the miles
 of hills like giant soldiers against storms,

where trout swam by the hundreds
 in the crystaline waters of rivers,
 where they were born to be nursed

and nannied by *mulatas* from Trinidad ...

 My father drank his beer and smiled
 at them all, at their invented stories, and when

asked about what he'd left behind, he simply
 said nothing, *nada*, he didn't own anything
 like what these other men lied about,

he had been a pattern cutter in Cuba,
 had fallen in love with my mother in Las Villas,
 brought her back to Havana where they had

their only child. His leaving Cuba
 was his own decision, no more no less,
 and he leaned back in his kitchen chair

with a glint of pride in his eyes, knowing
 there was no reason to lie, to embellish,
 though when his friends left, my father

thought of what none of them knew
 which was that he had played catch
 one time with Chuck Connors, the baseball

player turned actor on *The Rifleman*,
 reruns which he still enjoyed on television,
 and none of them knew that they spoke

to each other in the language of *beisbol*,
 two men, one Cuban, one American,
 playing catch in that one Havana summer

of my father's youth; that much was true.