

PETER RICHARDSON

DR. GOMEZ'S LONG RETURN FROM A SUNDAY BOTANIST'S FIELD TRIP

After his prolonged convulsions at the clinic run by the four sisters, he found he could speak Portuguese, which meant that the bark tea ingested in the hut of the elders who paddled him fast downriver

when the drug would not wear off had been on the whole beneficial despite the brush with gangrene, the dizziness and the purple snakes who spoke in telepathic baritones warning him against permanent

soul depletion if he placed doctoring over family for another breath, a fact he abides by these days, recalling how he'd begged for help in the bottom of that pirogue, how then words had come unbidden

to his lips, a vocabulary of which he was the delirious possessor as they bundled him into the clinic, Shipibo men, who heard him babbling the tongue of his long ago nurse, Francesca, his *nutriz*,

who would smile to see him slipping into Portuguese and having to be prompted back into Spanish by his wife or teenage daughter on one of their many car trips, undertaken almost every weekend

since he redid his balcony garden, whose seven kinds of orchids have become his botanical blanket, his petal cowl of assurance, his twentieth-story, harbour-view, coffee-and-crosswords nook

for convalescing so he can return to his rounds at pediatrics where his colleagues among the nurses advise him to spend a few more months among his dripping rainforest lovelies,

those frog, cigar and bamboo orchids, plants whose names and needs he anticipates as he shambles out to his balcony amid sirens, bells, and the drawn out blasts of boat horns.