Virgil Suárez

Haircut

HAVANA, CIRCA 1969

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
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.