Nick's Balcony, Brickell Key

Ricardo Pau-Llosa
NICK’S BALCONY, BRICKELL KEY

I

Why couldn’t I have willed the sudden concentricity of waves in Biscayne Bay so that now, pond-like and registering the drop of a stone against the calm, the tear and shove of the natural world could seem the locked effect of need?

Instead, I linger four stories above and beneath another three, tiered like cube-edged crystals scored with Babylon rims of succulents and ixoras mingling in the hang against the harbored wind. We face the city across a proper arm of sea, cleanly bridged, the windows lit like trays of costume jewelry. O Araby who broke the pubescent heart by shutting down and haunts every proof of odyssey, you’ve cast your net most certainly among the faded exiles of this child-heavy, memory-broken place. But they do not know or dare to turn and know the elision that subverts them. Let thirst be the hero of this hour and glass indoctrinated shore that counts itself with calipers of Either, for there is no greed
like that of panhandled rivers or the cracked tomb, and who but the vibrant amid the groomed options can flourish here? But I digress long enough to let the freakly centered waves dissolve the Bay into familiar nervousness, a quilt of calm dark stains hard-edging the crackling banners of halogen-peppered crests. This is the law of temperature upon liquid masses but likewise the fruit of chance for the data-frivolous eye that takes its seeing seriously. Hence poetry and Both.

II

We came, by sheer desire, from a sunken nation to frequent the surviving shore, to joke and revel and gather from the fast hunters how to master naturalness. Amid the shifting dunes, the strewn algae, we made the mirror of this city rise. A lawyer’s office balcony upon the Bay facing the tinker-toy skyline where more belief than profit is made. I have a cubalibre in hand, the other sleeve correctly angled into the blazer-draped pocket. I am surrounded by fellow children of an epic—though they are a decade younger, still its echo. They are the peasants of the seeming urban scape, content to feast on nibblings the abacus culture throws to them. Its interests are theirs, though
they would reject the thought outright and claim
an impossible Cubanity. Still, they could not be mistaken
for men and women of desperate straits, haggard
from a flight from mask. On the lawyer's balcony

I am more of them than not. Despite the weighing
with which I flatter my distances, of them I am and stay.

III

I too have borrowed Cuba by the tome,
glass-eyed my national emptiness, configured
the cosmetic data, studied the licensed pose.
It is a Cuban matter, so the cherished story goes,
to be so from another's balcony, behold the schooners
and cigarette boats, the flagrant fill of canvas
and the cleaver's foam, and think a sailing beheld
is a sailing undertaken. Explorer, but to the bench
of your mind get working and never stop, anvil
and hammer, or is it the tanner's indigence
of stretch and hue, the curing enterprise
by which a little longer in the grave a memory
prolongs itself? But these are not or ever will be
mine. Memory like little Perseus on Danae's raft
sleeps deeper into infancy while his mother,
damned by beauty and prophesy, harries out
the course of winters and gales. Before lie
the chance monsters and other proofs, but none
will return me or these other simply younger lost
to the cradle of native purpose. No welcomes.