

Hecale Acapulco

αλυκον δε οι εκπεσε δακρυ

[*a salt tear fell from him*]

– Callimachus, *Hecale*, Fragment 313

I

From the brazen sky that meets the saline sapphire bay at Acapulco
Warm summer noontides bring freshening squalls
To leave emerald tracks and sweet breezes upon the sea

One day in June 1969
A grand swift squall sent lightning and high surf
To drown a boy between the rocks
near *Avenida Costera Miguel Aleman*
But for two gringos there to save him

Dioscuri to fish him out of the surf
To massage the ocean from his lungs

One gringo saves the boy
The other gringo loses his shoes

While the squall grows to tempest
The clever boy regains his breath

The gringos seek lodging
Such as the family of this boy can offer

Hecale Acapulco
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His father Roberto ex-CIA at the Cuba desk
Maybe somebody else's spook too, once
Now just spooked

His mother Senora Elena
Compassionate yet less dignified
Now than once

A fine bungalow of the prosperous Forties on Lomas del Mar
With a broad verandah where you can see the ocean
With a swimming pool filled with what Texans called June bugs
With a servant *mestiza* and her daughters to cook and clean
Who call Roberto *borracho cabron*

Wanting 3000 pesos Roberto asked 300
Your word is your word in Mexico
The gringos took it and Elena had more to say to Roberto

She said it at the top of her voice
Your word is your word in Mexico
Pacing the lush patio at the head of the drive

The boy glad to bring home these exotic princes from *El Norte*
One gringo a soldier savior and the other a shoeless poet
A knight and a minstrel

When they are older
A cleric and a teacher
Or a merchant and a philosopher

When they are elder
Scientist and shaman
A bishop and a prophet

Time travelers on a lark
Complementary world lines crossing
Polarities comfortably in opposition
On the verandah at Lomas del Mar

There was Roberto in high song and gin
The first gringo cherished his bourbon in growing disdain
The second gringo charmed by his third or fourth *Carta Blanca*

“Fidel runs things and Raoul is his killer!” harkens Roberto,
“The penis of a man and the womb of a woman,” lights his cigarette with a sip,
“Is the secret of life!”

Happy to have passed on the idea of joining the Ibu in Nigeria
The soldier gringo sings to himself gazing toward the Las Brisas
“I made you love me...”

The mulatto beauty on the beach this afternoon
The muse whispers to the poet gringo
Will not taste like your lover.

II

Before the red storm blew in from Cuban Santiago
Elena’s days were happy and her nights ecstatic
Courtied by handsome dangerous Roberto in Batista’s Havana

A diplomat's daughter's best days and best nights

So too for her suitor

A sharp kid out of college just right for the OSS

But that war doused by Truman's A-bomb

A fine new war seeded by Stalin's A-bomb

Germinating in Latin American soil sown by corrupt men

Blooming in the shadow of tomorrow

Other sharp kids with fewer advantages like the Castro boys

Seize the opportunity to liberate their homeland

Sacrificing forever the chance to play baseball in the majors

Taking up the gun to make a game Roberto's CIA liked to play

Doing better than their grandfathers

Trading Havana harbor boiler explosions for the Bay of Pigs

One house-cleaning follows another

Fidel and Raoul got a palace in Havana

Sugar subsidies with nuclear missiles in tow

Roberto and Elena got an apartment in Mexico District Federal

Then by a weird fate LBJ got the White House

Vietnam and the words of Martin Luther King

And Roberto and Elena got *Dinero de Papa* and Lomas del Mar

"I lost him," Roberto was fond of confessing

"Then the bastard turned up in Dallas."

The boy does not always live here

A block up from the Aleman and the beach of Acapulco Bay

Elena's family wants him back in military school

Tomorrow he must return to Cuernavaca

Soon the bugle will summon a new semester

Tonight a farewell dinner on the verandah

For everyone loves this boy

Iguana and *cerveza* and tequila

The passionate lonely Swan Elena encircled

An Aleman attorney's suspicious chivalry

Roberto's incoherent jealousy

A joyful Murder of Mestiza Crows—

Our servant's daughter in love with a vaquero of San Luis Potosi

Everyone loves to speak of

The glories of boyhood

The follies of manhood

The temptations of girlhood

The sadness of womanhood

This endless journey

No traveler to ever cross its horizon

“Never been to Cuernavaca!”

The boy's two gringos will join him

On his bus to the other world

Cuernavaca *academia militar*

Then push on to Mexico City

With *teonanacatl* and *ololiuhqui* enough

To grab the train to Nuevo Laredo

Senora Elena peers into the soul of the barefoot gringo

Just a boy like her own

Minstrel who has not yet heard his song

Prophet who has not yet seen his vision
Elena suddenly kisses him
the son who must be sacrificed.

III

Three tales to be told on the *Otro Mundo* bus
The boy's two gringos throw the trio of bags under their seats at the back
"Today is a good day to live!"
Where the rear window can be levered open against the stink and smoke
Of peasants and old women and gringos

Low clouds dress the coastal hills above the bay
This road north to the central plateau
The *Otro Mundo* bus climbs to Chilpacingo
This white stucco village languishing in lush foothills

The gringos choose their sacrament, breath of the Python
Pour their libation from an old thermos, painted for the purpose
"Soma from the future," the poet gringo shares with the boy

The gringo knight told his tale
Let me be your war
That would kill you certain if you went

Vietnam—"Sometimes they say something, sometimes just dead"
Encircled my back bathed in blood the friend behind me dead
Delirious with pain wasted our cowardly corpsman as he fled

“When I kill a man have I
Sent him to his fathers’ forever bliss
Or pitched him to an eternal abyss?”

“Maybe that is what Judgement is
Which shadow is eternal night
And which the dark curtain of hell?”

“If there is no soul then death is just oblivion
What a joke on God and the Devil
No soul to suffer misery or self-righteous rapture
No Elysium for philosophers or Valhalla for me!”

The minstrel gringo told his tale to boy and bishop
“Metempsychosis—reincarnation, resurrection, or oblivion?
Can a soul, your soul, my soul, be sold by a fool or renewed by a shaman?
Where are the dead, Heaven or Gaia?”

What do you want more than strong drink and good smoke
What is more important than Texas bullshit spread all over Guerrero
And Chihuahuan *lophophora williamsii* all over Texas
But fine companions to deliver this young man to his education?
“You and this journey are my song
My ‘Breeze Analysis of Acapulco.’”

Now they were not far from Cuernavaca
When the boy told his tale to the gringos
Of Tlatelolco, “Sahagun’s beloved College”—
Aztec Sacrificial ground become monument to the Olympic Ideal

“My cousin Heladio who is a student at the University took me along

We saw flares and heard shots so we ducked in the *Iglesia de Santiago*
Then quickly ran out behind the apartment house
Men with rifles were coming down the stairs”

“The sirens of the ambulances were as terrifying as the shooting of the soldiers”
Three hundred murders in the Plaza of Three Cultures
“The *mujer roja* was everywhere!”

IV

At the Cuernavaca bus station
“Take care of yourself, Heladio of the Blue Bay”
The gringo knight bid the boy
“Believe your eyes but listen to your heart.”

The gringo minstrel touched the boy’s shoulder
“I went to military school myself—
“*Via con Dios, Yaje.*”

V

Now the Feast of Corpus Christi fills the Gran Zocalo of the D.F.
Peasant boys in white cotton and charming girls adorned by many bright colors
The Cathedral draws the spirit of the Aztecs from their rest below
Slaughtered and Christianized and still cursed by their own ways
Two outsiders they call gringos disappear into the crowd
As a northbound *Aeromexico* jet climbs into a pale summer anvil.

VI

And when the boy who was saved from drowning by gringos in 1969
Returned to Lomas Del Mar a very good and honest young man
Elena like an emerald track on Acapulco Bay was gone

Elena gone to sapphire sea below brazen sky
αλυκον δε οι εκπεσε δακρυ — “a salt tear fell from him”
Leaving sweet breezes to caress his memory.

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