Cuba

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It is summer in Key Tavernier.
I lie in water thick like salty syrup,
and watch my grandfather plant coconut
seeds in the gravel next to the house.
I imagine the men that must have dug this canal.
Perhaps they were Cuban men,
men like my grandfather thrusting dirt
with magnificent shovels—the sweat of their
exertion mixing with the salt of the ocean water.
I am swimming in the sweat
of men I have never known as
my grandfather spits into dry gravel
so coconut trees burst forth,
rich green leaves hanging heavy with round fruit.

I beg to taste the coconut milk.
My grandfather tugs at the hairy sphere,
pulling it down from the tree’s jealous clutch.
He breaks the coconut in half with his
bony hands and pours the crusted white
liquid into a long glass with a straw tucked inside.
I sip the warm milk, and dream of Cuba:

It is a small island floating in
a sea of black beans and rice.
The air is heavy as chicken broth,
and wet dresses draped over a brittle
clothesline slowly simmer in the heat,
turning brown and crisp at the edges.
I see my grandmother before she died,
the woman I never met
gently swaying in a rocking chair
formed from golden straw.
She shreds the tender beef for tonight’s
dinner of ropa vieja, placing the shiny meat
into a rusted pot cradled in her lap.
And then, suddenly I see him.  
My father as a round  
ten year old boy bobs  
down the cobble stone street,  
grasping a toy truck in his plump hand.  
He smiles, his face turned towards me.  
I try to speak to him, to ask him  
what it's like and what it means,  
but the coconut milk is sour glue on my tongue  
and my voice comes out in the wrong language.