

Looking for The Gulf Motel



RICHARD BLANCO

Cheers to Hyakutake

Everglades National Park

for Carlos

The last time humans saw the comet,
man hadn't learned to speak, you said,
and we talked about them—us—grunting
at the sky, drawing deer and their hands
over cave walls with blood and soot.
That's all they—we—could do against
all we didn't know 17,000 years ago.
Now look at us, I said, we've walked
on the moon, mapped our galaxy,
seen the edges of the universe—not bad.
We were good at *that* kind of talk, those
mysteries of time and space, remember?

You pointed the telescope and fiddled
with the knobs—Look, that's Sirius,
you told me, then asked if all the stars
had been named. Probably, I thought,
we've named everything: this swamp
called *River of Grass*, under moon shadows
of trees called cypress, watching the light
of insects named fireflies, and ghosts
of birds you said were ibis sleeping
in the branches until sunrise. Names—

even for what we couldn't see or quite
understand: joy, hate, love, jealousy.
We were no good at *that* kind of talk,
remember? We had no language for

those mysteries: two men consumed with one another. Why did we want to leave as much as we wanted to stay all our lives talking about Einstein, fractals, black holes, always the end of time, never the end of us. No words

for that attraction/repulsion stronger than both our wills. Instead we spoke about double stars orbiting one another, one day colliding, destroying themselves in one dense mass of light, and we raised our plastic cups of wine to Hyakutake, its fiery tail tearing through the sky— Cheers, you said, putting your arm around my shoulder, We'll never see anything like this again. Remember?



"W. H. Auden, asked to define poetry from the other written arts, wrote that poetry was 'memorable speech.' Richard Blanco's speech invites the reader in with its search for home. His lyrics open doors onto his Cuban immigrant family, his father's early death, and his own migration from a life in Florida to a life in Maine. His speech houses a generous love of others and a persistent reach for what is absent. There is nothing here you will not remember."—Spencer Reece

"Every poem in *Looking for The Gulf Motel* packs an emotional wallop and an intellectual caress. A virtuoso of art and craft who juggles the subjective and the objective beautifully, Blanco is at the height of his creative prowess and one of the best of the best poets writing today."—Jim Elledge

"The poems in *Looking for The Gulf Motel* are bittersweet songs that ache with the 'sweet and slow honey of a bolero.' They croon about journeys from Cuba and Spain to Florida and Maine; mourn languages, lovers, and names that were or could have been; and praise the forgotten pop culture icons that expanded one young person's view of his nationality and manhood. If all loss is like exile, Blanco tells us, then searching for love (in the self, in others) is healing, is finding home, because 'love is thicker than any country.'"—Rigoberto González



Photo by Nikki Moustaki

Richard Blanco is the author of two previous poetry collections: *Directions to The Beach of the Dead*, winner of the PEN/Beyond Margins Award; and *City of a Hundred Fires*, winner of the Agnes Lynch Starrett Poetry Prize. Exploring themes of Latino identity and place, his poems have appeared in *Best American Poetry 2000* and *Best American Prose Poems* and have been featured on NPR. Blanco is a fellow of the Bread Loaf Writers Conference, recipient of two Florida Artist Fellowships, and has taught at Georgetown and American universities. A builder of cities and poems, Blanco is also a professional civil engineer.

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Richard Blanco

DIRECTIONS TO THE BEACH OF THE DEAD



“Reading this collection gave me the thrilling feeling I was trespassing on the intimate correspondence between a lover and a beloved—and filled me with envy. Ah, to be the receiver of such exquisite letters! Ah, to be the object of such exquisite love!”

SANDRA CISNEROS

Nowhere

But

Here

poems by Richard Blanco



For the journey, together: Sonia, Darden, Carlos,
Nikki, Alberto and Mark.