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On Avenida 4

Lorna Van Gilst

Dordt College

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Dawn

Just before El Sol
peers over the mountain,
street dogs bark
and roosters crow
from the barrio,
where morning creeps up
pink-edged and hopeful,
tinging the red-block dwellings
pressed row upon row
into the rocky ledge,
laced by long-fingered fronds
of wild cambur trees
and scrubs of wild locust,
roots knuckled
to the bony face of the slope.

Boldly now,
sunlight spills over the
red-tile roofs
down the avenue
into the plaza.

Dark-eyed chico works the streets,
his mother’s coffee thermos
dangling from one thumb—
Cafecito, cafecito, cafecito
This little man, so confident—
a fist of paper cups.
“¿Cuántos?” How much?
“Dos cien”—ten cents—
three swallows in a paper cup.
Two silver coins now pressed
into the supple little hand—
Cafecito, cafecito, cafecito—
Halfway to breakfast.
Body Parts

At Ripley’s Fabrca on Avenida 4
each morning I step past
five suave half-manikans
lined up outside the door—
black, stunning yellow, pale blue, deep olive, tangerine—
sleek stretchy lycra hugging shapely hips,
smooth thighs, tight knees, bell bottoms flared
around glass-slippered feet
going nowhere.

And suspended on the wall above
Three stretch-knit torsos
—headless, heartless—
waiting for a match.

Close Encounter

“Oh, Profie,” she greets me
there on the street,
cheek to cheek, in the Latin way,
Asks how I am—¿Como estas?
Her soft supple Spanish piling up
around me like a cloud—
Remember me—she says—you visited
my home, taught my José.
“Oh, sí,” I say—I have met
five hundred one Josés—
She says come to her puesto
in El Mercado Principal—third floor—
She kisses me good-bye,
“Hasta luego”
disappears into a bus . . .
Adios, mother of José.