

Trinidad, Cuba

June 2012

It's as though time itself broke down—
like the rainbow-colored finned cars from the '50s
we pass. Horse carts. Dogs, friendly as the people,
roam free. Violet thunbergia and gold allamanda
climb decaying walls, poinciana and plumeria
hug houses painted in sherbet shades.
Porches with rocking chairs, men smoking.
Ahead, a hundred vultures circle something dead.

We pass a cemetery. Our guide, Gustavo,
tells us the island dead are buried in the ground.
He looks and sounds like Ricardo Montalban did
on *Fantasy Island*, but isn't dressed in white,
though a man crossing the cobblestone street is.
"A *santero*," Gustavo says.
"White worn for a year to purify the soul."

At meals we're served Havana Club and colas,
mojitos, or *Bucanero* beers as musicians
play *Bésame Mucho*—a song I haven't heard
since Aunt Hilda's wedding that hot June
afternoon in the '40s—she an angel in white,
bridal veil to satin shoes, who danced with me,
let me taste her rum and Coke
in the small smoke-filled second-floor restaurant.

Wanda S. Praisner