

Another Day in La Habana

Both hurricanes have passed. There are no fruits to buy because trees have been uprooted. No vegetables either because the animals pawed up the plants trying to forage for water and food and ate the vegetables and trampled on all the bottles of spring water waiting to be delivered to Havana from the country bottling plant, they say. Five different stores in the neighborhood I stay in are out of the large 3000ML and the 1500ML medium-size of bottled water and have only the 500ML size which now costs as much as the large ones normally do. There are no rolls of toilet paper anywhere -- the Cubanos must have hoarded them knowing the weather was turning -- only packages of napkins which nobody buys or uses when they eat because they're too expensive. There are no cartridges of ink for my printer in the entire city of Havana with three million people and businesses and offices and commerce, but one Canadian company finally agrees to refill mine gratis but only once. There are two copy shops open on Calle Obispo, a main tourist mall, but one shop has only one copy machine and it is broken. At the other shop two men who are sitting on the stoop smoking reefer say that the man who makes copies won't be here until Monday afternoon. The Café Francesa on the Prado we usually frequent is out of the good beer and is only stocking Bucanero, which tastes like piss, and the Torticas and Pasteles de Queso, pastries I order daily, were gone by 10:00am this morning. My coffee friend, Nick, from England, who brings out my sense of humor isn't at our usual table at our café either, so I go to check my emails at the Hotel Inglaterra where four out of five of the computers are out of order and the fifth one uses my entire six-dollar hour card, just to open and show my list of emails on AOL before the light flashes and the message reads "uno minuto más." I slam out of the front door and, looking at the line of taxis in front of the hotel, jump in a tan, 1950s illegal one, which is much cheaper than the regular ones, to meet a friend. We stop at three gas stations that are out of petrol and four blocks later black smoke curls out from under the hood, the car sputters and jerks another few feet, then lies down quietly in the middle of the road with cars honking behind us and people swearing, "coño, pinga, singár, maricón," and my driver orders me out but

Another Day...

the door has no inside handle and I will be in the middle of traffic, “tome otro, take another” he says getting out and wrenching it open with a screech of metal rubbing metal. I dash across limping slightly because this morning when I took my sandal to the shoemaker to fix the loose and fraying strap between my toes he said that he had no more nails or leather and it has now torn completely. I dance down the street trying to avoid the potholes, places where the sidewalk is missing completely, piles of dog shit, they have no pooper-scooper laws here, thinking I’ll call my friend and ask if there’s another day, then I’ll go back to my apartment where the toilet probably still smells, because the motor in the basement got waterlogged from last night’s rain and there was no water in the bathroom or kitchen when I left. I stop at one of the other hotels on the way to enquire if I can use their swimming pool even though I’m not a resident of the hotel. It’s now twenty pesos CUCs daily whether one eats or not, when it was only five three months ago without food and today they have no fresh salt water anyway, so it’s closed. I go to the immigration office for foreigners across the street from my building to ask a couple of questions about extending my visa another month, but the woman I speak to won’t answer any questions, she just tells me that the office I need has moved and the procedure for extending my visa has changed. I finally climb the three floors to my apartment, but my key won’t unlock the door, so I knock on my neighbors’ doors until I find Raul, who was napping and takes a while before he opens his door a crack to see who it is. When I tell him the problem he joins me but can’t budge it either. We go back to his apartment to call Leonor, my landlady, who says she’ll be there in “un ratuco,” a little while, but she’s not sure her bus is still running. If not she’ll have to walk a mile or so and take three different ones to get here, but she will call her teenage grandson who is living down the street from me who is good at such things, he’d been arrested for breaking and entering. He jimmys the door open, I thank him, then close the door, practically falling over my suitcase still sitting by the door ready to go with José Carlos, the man I live with, to Veradero. My friend must be worried about me, I pick up the telephone but there’s no dial tone. I check the connections, they’re all plugged in, the actual phone line runs through a hole in my wall, through another

Another day...

hole in my neighbor's wall to his connection, which is probably loose or fallen out again. I knock our three-knock code, but he's not home. It is now 5:14pm and José Carlos, who was supposed to be here early this morning after his shift in the hospital, is not here yet but he almost never calls to update me or give me information. So now we've lost another day along with the other five days of our week's vacation, but I can't bear to unpack. I sit and listen to the noises in the street and I'm exhausted. I try to keep the lump in my throat down, crying makes José Carlos angry. I have no food because I thought we were leaving, but at least a little trickle of water spills out of the faucet in the kitchen, enough to splash on my face and cool my palms, and maybe within the hour there will be enough to flush the toilet. I turn on the TV, only one channel has no snow and the radio has more static than music. If we were together none of these crazy things would matter. Here in Havana they are all part of a normal day. I stare at my suitcase. I'm so tired of promises and disappointments and trying to hold it all together. Like everything around me, I feel myself breaking down part by part.

1165 Words

