

## The Next Stop

“I’ll meet you on the other side.”

He leans down to kiss her.

She is directed into the screening cage in the American Consulate in Havana. The basketball breasted woman holds out her hand, “passport!” Takes her passport, feels her up. Checks for weapons, and lets her through.

They bring him in from the long line waiting out with all the other Cubans on the street, sit him down next to her, ask him the required questions.

“Quien es el presidente des Estados Unidos?”

The Consulate interviewer’s Spanish is terrible. Bad accent. The Cuban doesn’t speak any English.

*“Felicidades.”* The interviewer says after more such questions. *“tu estás en lo correcto, por ciento.”* She had practiced with him.

This Cuban neurosurgeon is going back to the hospital to work, she thinks. He leans down to kiss the top of her head. They part.

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“Is this the right place?” she asks a passerby in the International waiting room of JFK, Terminal 4. The woman nods and hurries on, nose down, leaning forward.

Its smell, like wet clothes, reminds her of his sister’s bedroom in Havana. Its hard for her to catch her breath in the dank air, no windows only boarded up squares along the opposite wall where an old man slumps, dead or sleeping, along a row of rickety wooden chairs. She takes out her wallet;

“Forty-five dollars coming, forty-five more going home.” She looks up at the exit door and thinks of the time he didn’t show. Said he got sick in Havana airport. She sniffs and rubs her eyes. Two years of planning. Paperwork after paperwork, same information repeated again and again. Appointments, interviews, Xeroxed photos, phone bills, medical exams. Two years of prep.

“Marriage in ninety days or back to Cuba with all your treasures,” the Consulate Interviewer had said, handing the Cuban the treasured manila envelope. Of course they’ll get married. She never thought she’d be here again, in love at 63.

The door opens and he steps out, smiling his beautiful, shy grin, swinging only one small, battered suitcase.

“Where are all your things,” she asks pointing down.

“In Cuba, of course. Where do you think they are?”

He leans down to kiss her.

