

## Legacies

1.

The one thing you have from your father,  
you didn't get from your father.  
You stole it from your son,  
who inherited it from his grandfather.  
A gold ring, oval aquamarine framed  
by tiny diamonds. He flaunted it,  
Cuban to the end, until your mother took it off his finger.  
Hurricanes, *nortes*, sweater weather, *canícula*  
registered on its watery face: gray, blue, bluer, bluest.

2.

*The Antiques Road Show*: in Mobile,  
a Civil War sword and scabbard that belonged  
to someone's greatgrandfather; in Pittsburgh,  
the fake 18th century writing desk, a family heirloom;  
in Chicago, the Remington lithograph; in St. Louis,  
the Navajo quilt; in Chapel Hill, a purloined ring.

3.

It's an advantage not to get by on yourself.  
To be able to brag (to no one but yourself):  
I am that man's grandson, that man  
was my father, and that other man, my son.  
It makes you alone more than you alone.

4.

Look back and you see an island,  
sand and stucco and a Spaniard named  
José, just off the boat and already balding,  
pedaling a bike, peddling potatoes in Old Havana.  
Look back again and you see an island,  
a clump of hibiscus and a park bench  
where another Spaniard, his name was Pedro,  
railed against sugar, praised the potato.

5.

Say to yourself: A man rich  
in hand-me-downs is a rich man.

6.

Yet there are days, weekday afternoons  
late in summer, when the longer you look,  
the less you feel for José's island,  
and Pedro's too, the less it touches you.  
Then you put on the Tony Bennett CD  
and say: this is the tongue I use for feeling.

7.

The family comes over, Sunday lunch,  
and they cannot touch you either.  
After they leave, you search the drawers.  
Feeling marine, feeling aquatic,  
you find the ring you've never worn.

8.

So: you disdain what you desire.  
I know the type.  
Not even the ring you took from your son  
who had it from your father can set you straight.  
Slip it onto your finger. It will change nothing.

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