An Afternoon in Maracay: Venezuelan Portrait

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I stride through the streets squinting, focused in the rays of a thousand tin roofs, and tears come to my eyes. Through the shimmering heat, a peeling poster smiles cold Pepsi-Cola at sweaty frowns. The soda disciples gather at this corner shrine to drink the blood of America, and to dream of the New Generation that passed them by. Above, on the chalky paint wall, stares Jesus Christ and his Sacred Heart wreathed in thorns, eyes glancing upward away from the dusty crowd, his cheeks hollow in pious silence. Tipping the last of the cola down his throat, a taxi driver buys a saint for ten bolivares and dangles it from his dashboard, leaving its sad expression dancing in the car with the rolling merengue beat. Old women, wrinkled, like ripe passionfruits, chase pigeons in the plaza while the iguanas nap in the tropical rustle of the trees above. Suddenly, I’m surrounded by dirty tanktop children, their soft brown eyes frozen in the glare of my cleanliness. I look away, embarrassed by my intrusion, wishing my clothes weren’t so carefully pressed, with my newly shined shoes accusing me from the asphalt.

—Trenton L. Hickman