

Opening

After the sun glows into the Caribbean, the heat piles into heaps. The evening cools slightly. Humidity licks at forearms, throat, waistband, and the back of the neck. Sleep arrives slowly kindly helped by the false breeze from a fan. In early morning, the wind blows into the apartment with the sand. On the outdoor steps of Cristimar, the apartment, the wind stiffens from the north and thrashes my gray hair. I grit my teeth and whirl my back against windward.

The taxi to Bureche is stop and go, go, go. The cab driver makes a breath-sucking pass around the truck toward an oncoming bus. I grip the handle above the door.

Alive and alone I stand on the balcony of the second floor of the high school. I lean against the railing. Mornings are perpetual summer in the tropic. Overhead, blackbirds join a chorus of green parrots. A fat iguana muscles up the trunk of the tree next to me, close enough to enter my space. But, I'm no longer startled. They are shy as deer even though they look like dragons. It is soon arriving students that raise my anxiety. Unlocking the classroom door, I review the morning plan for the fourteenth time. I fuss with the chairs, and return to the refuge of the balcony.

At the far end, a tree grows twisted toward the sky, and then veers almost horizontally eastward. Its leaves appear withered and sparse. The tree survives the lack of water through a massive trunk supported by miles of roots. In fall, monsoons arrive to fill the roots.

My attention rises to a blue mountain as the sun finds a notch and spills gold down the broad Santa Marta Valley, and on to the coastal panorama from Tagnanga to El Rodadero. The light slides from the mountain to my companionable tree. I am comforted by sunrise. Some sunrises are remembered in frosty alpine glades, or seen

through the pineapple rain of Maui's diffused light. Many sunrises are caught in my soul
as life preservers. I imbibe sweet calm.