Martín Espada

**Coca-Cola and Coco Frío**

On his first visit to Puerto Rico, island of family folklore, the fat boy wandered from table to table with his mouth open. At every table, some great-aunt would steer him with cool spotted hands to a glass of Coca-Cola. One even sang to him, in all the English she could remember, a Coca-Cola jingle from the forties. He drank obediently, though he was bored with this potion, familiar from soda fountains in Brooklyn.

Then, at a roadside stand off the beach, the fat boy opened his mouth to coco frío, a coconut chilled, then scalped by a machete so that a straw could inhale the clear milk. The boy tilted the green shell overhead and drooled coconut milk down his chin; suddenly, Puerto Rico was not Coca-Cola or Brooklyn, and neither was he.

For years afterward, the boy marveled at an island where the people drank Coca-Cola and sang jingles from World War II in a language they did not speak, while so many coconuts in the trees sagged heavy with milk, swollen and unsuckled.