The Colonel

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WHAT YOU HAVE HEARD is true. I was in his house. His wife carried   
a tray of coffee and sugar. His daughter filed her nails, his son went     
out for the night. There were daily papers, pet dogs, a pistol on the   
cushion beside him. The moon swung bare on its black cord over   
the house. On the television was a cop show. It was in English.   
Broken bottles were embedded in the walls around the house to   
scoop the kneecaps from a man's legs or cut his hands to lace. On   
the windows there were gratings like those in liquor stores. We had   
dinner, rack of lamb, good wine, a gold bell was on the table for   
calling the maid. The maid brought green mangoes, salt, a type of   
bread. I was asked how I enjoyed the country. There was a brief   
commercial in Spanish. His wife took everything away. There was   
some talk then of how difficult it had become to govern. The parrot   
said hello on the terrace. The colonel told it to shut up, and pushed   
himself from the table. My friend said to me with his eyes: say   
nothing. The colonel returned with a sack used to bring groceries   
home. He spilled many human ears on the table. They were like   
dried peach halves. There is no other way to say this. He took one   
of them in his hands, shook it in our faces, dropped it into a water   
glass. It came alive there. I am tired of fooling around he said. As   
for the rights of anyone, tell your people they can go fuck them-   
selves. He swept the ears to the floor with his arm and held the last   
of his wine in the air. Something for your poetry, no? he said. Some   
of the ears on the floor caught this scrap of his voice. Some of the   
ears on the floor were pressed to the ground.   
                                                                                     *May 1978*