Chocolate Che
Also by Damian Furniss

The Duchess of Kalighat
DAMIAN FURNISS

Chocolate Che

Shearsman Books
Exeter
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Chocolate Che

To celebrate Thanksgiving Day
The Yankees baked a chocolate Che
With buttermilk from Camaguey
And cacao from the factory
He founded in the heady days
When cocoa was revolutionary.

He wore a marzipan beret,
Its insignia that rarity—
A perfect star-shaped strawberry—
To strip the comandante
Who took the I from industry
Of the badge that gave him dignity.

They gagged him with a Cadbury’s flake
Imported by the C.I.A.
And stretched him on a rack of cane
Lashed onto a Chevrolet,
Carved him up at Gitmo Bay
With harvest blunt machetes—

Took his head to the Admiralty
As their cut of the bounty
That is La Isla Grande,
Then toasted him with rum flambé
In memory of Hemingway—
Red flames, like the blues, they fade away
Three Buckets for Love

Welcome to my home. I do not live here.
This is the bathroom, it has no bath.
Three buckets for love, a dripping tap.

Frames without doors, the curtains part—
Mama launders bread in her chamber pot.
Welcome to my home, she does not live here.

Her vest bares a rash of day-glo hearts.
Under the arc of a hung bulb stand
Three buckets for love. A dripping tap

Ticks stage left of our netted bed.
Brothers call cues from the room next door.
Welcome to my home, they do not live here.

Papa stirs the pot, tucks in with his spoon—
A black bean soup with bones, twice stewed—
Three buckets for love. A dripping tap

Salutes the dawn. Stool pigeons perch behind
The moon. Two parrots rap on the washing line.
Welcome to my home. You do not live here.
Three buckets for love. A dripping tap.
The Existentialist Sandwich

I order a sandwich—
A dairy-free sandwich
A meatless, vegless sandwich
Plain as a Ukrainian
Sliced bread naked
As the day it was baked

My waiter, the doctor
The doctor, my waiter
Pleads to authority
The rule of ledgers
Dictates equal measures
Of ham and cheese

A Spaniard intervenes
Declares an open sandwich
Curdled milk and meat
Untainted by wheat
Gherkins on the side—
A Spaniard’s dream

We split the sandwich
Like a breast man, a leg man
Might share a striptease
Order Daiquiris
To celebrate the victory
Of west over east

While the waiter dreams of sandwiches—
The imaginary sandwich
The sandwich that makes itself
The sandwich that eats other sandwiches
For breakfast, lunch and dinner
The sandwich that just wants to be.
My Daddy Was a Studebaker

In the era of General Motors, on a day in late September, we left Detroit: headed due south, chrome noses sniffing at the moon.

We were of twelve marques. There were the Cadillacs and the Chevrolets; the Plymouths, the Buicks and the Pontiacs. But my Daddy was a Studebaker. Built like an airplane, he yearned to fly.

We travelled in convoy, followed the migration routes from the Windy City down to Miami. We had sitting rooms inside us and ate at roadside diners. Gas was cheaper than water then—we just stuck a long straw into the earth and sucked up its blood.

At the ocean’s edge we greased our trunks with pomade and primed our fins for the sea. By the power of Henry Ford, the waves parted. We sounded our horns as we passed the Florida Keys, said goodbye to the Land of the Free.

Havana was just a short cruise away. Life was good those first days of be-bop, mojitos, and cabaret. We were always well lubricated. Our parts replaced themselves. On rest days, a valet rubbed us down.

But then, without warning, we were abandoned on the runway. Horses descended from the mountains. Beards sprouted from pencil thin moustaches. From that day on, time was a cinema reel.

Only rumours from our homeland kept us going, our tyres bald but unbroken. New marques had crossed the ocean, invading the ports of our kin. All signs pointed east and we followed them, eight lanes of asphalt ending in a field.

Not used to hard labour, we drank sugar cane, spluttered and grew weak. In the city, our cousins married Russians, had their hearts transplanted for Ladas.
Now we’re rented out for weddings or made to escort tourists. Hitchers show us their onions. When strangers stroke our bonnets, we blow smoke into their faces.

But my Daddy was a Studebaker. I was made an American, with American dreams. There are roles in the movies for cars like me.
(This Sonnet Is Sponsored By) Sonneti

Dig the dirt, Henry. Sift for dead men’s teeth.       
Yank steak and kidney from that big cat’s jaw.       
Pluck blood fruit, Henry, from the citrus trees,    
Snatch back your heart, a beat between the claws    
Of feline Fidel, with his snake-hipped grin         
Spitting pips of morse, launching nicotine         
From the face that launched a thousand cigars      
With a mundungus broadcast of catarrh.              

My time is yours, Henry—our time, not his.         
His time is through now, worn like faded fatigues.  
No one told you, Henry, there’d be days like this— 
Pulling Che poses in your Sonneti jeans.            
Tug your cap down, Henry. If the dead could speak  
They’d take the long knives to your radical chic.   

Goodfella

Spain is fine this time of year
But a deckchair is no place
For such a great buffoon.
Why, he said grace with men
Cut from every cloth, hung
Their hats and heads from hooks.

Now he goes to bed at dawn
To drink a case of sun, dreaming
Of the night the stage was his—
A balcony of stars twinkled
With applause, wise guys roared
For blood, rained down the fizz.

But old man moon will rise again
In spats, a cane and monocle,
Barking through the curtains like a loon.
Red cheeked and open mouthed
He bore his glorious behind
For the glad eyes in the crowd—

They say the songs he sung
Cast sequins on the hides
Of each diva in the chorus line
As he climbed the spiral stairway,
His top hat and a bren gun
All we have to remember him by.
Che in Disguise

Plucked bald as a yam,
Grey streaked in the minge
That remains of his mane,
Che snipes off two frames,
Puffs in the desk-weight
That strains at his waist.
Fat cat that ran a bank
Wants to play at mouse
In a mask of Bakelite
He buffs up, checks twice—
Fails to recognise himself.

His wife herds in the kids,
Geese who poke and hiss
At each other, then notice
The silver fox, thoughtful
In the corner. He takes each
To his gurning mouth,
Shoos them squealing out.
His daughter pouts bye-byes,
Tells her anxious mother
That Uncle she’d not met
Just fell in love with her.
Fidel’s Beard

Fidel’s beard is a little explored region beneath Fidel’s nose. A jungle once exposed to Agent Orange, Napalm and carpet-bombing, reports the area is still subject to a secret war have been confirmed by satellite photographs that show its coverage is less lustrous than before, although some claim it is merely a victim of climate change, being much ravaged by hurricanes.

Fidel’s beard has been serenaded by barbershop quartets in the pay of the CIA. Long admired by mothers with combs and handkerchiefs, all the double agents sent to massage its host with DDT switched their defoliant for talcum powder and joined the beard’s secret harem. But now, insiders say, the beard of our former enemy is little more than a flea circus, its tick acrobats turning tricks for visiting dignitaries.

Fidel’s beard has tickled more muchachas than the sproutings of Marx or Lenin. Scrapbooks of its cuttings fill several miles of library shelving. Over fifty years in the growing, it has received more decorations than any other beard in history. It has outlasted nine beardless American presidents. Not so much as a single moustache has been grown against it. But all these words say no more than the stroking of a chin conveys.
Havana’s the Woman

Havana’s the woman I long for:
Her gap-toothed smile an open door
From my world into hers, clothes hung
From her balcony, flags of welcoming
As I rumba up the Malecon
A suitcase of shoes under my arm
Just to hear the cha-cha-cha
Of her heels as she greets me
With an invitation to bailar.
Kick off your crocodile shoes, she’ll say,
And mambo like Benny Moré.

And though she is no longer young
The trill song of her laugh will fill
Our garden with the tra-la-la
Of a lovebird, still an old fifteen.
And when we marry, her family
Will deck our Cadillac with lilies,
Then pelt me with rice and beans.
And when I leave her, forms in hand,
She’ll rock her chair against the sea
As waves crash over the harbour wall
And then retreat into history.