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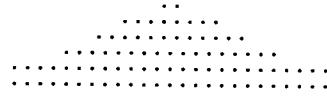
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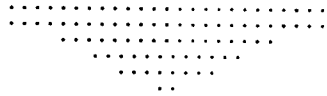
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A N D R E D U B U S I I I



HOUSE
OF SAND
AND FOG



ANDRE DUBUS III



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HOUSE
OF SAND
AND FOG

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ALSO BY ANDRE DUBUS III

The Cagekeeper and Other Stories
Bluesman

*For my brother, Jeb, and for my four sisters,
Suzanne, Nicole, Cadence, and Madeleine*

Beyond myself

somewhere

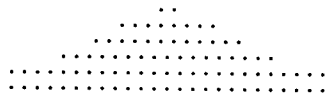
I wait for my arrival

—From “*The Balcony*” by Octavio Paz

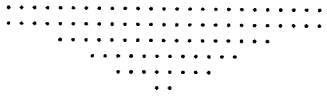
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HOUSE
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PART I



THE FAT ONE, THE RADISH TOREZ, HE CALLS ME CAMEL BECAUSE I AM Persian and because I can bear this August sun longer than the Chinese and the Panamanians and even the little Vietnamese Tran. He works very quickly without rest, but when Torez stops the orange highway truck in front of the crew, Tran hurries for his paper cup of water with the rest of them. This heat is no good for work. All morning we have walked this highway between Sausalito and the Golden Gate Park. We carry our small trash harpoons and we drag our burlap bags and we are dressed in vests the same color as the highway truck. Some of the Panamanians remove their shirts and leave them hanging from their back pockets like oil rags, but Torez says something to them in their mother language and he makes them wear the vests over their bare backs. We are upon a small hill. Between the trees I can see out over Sausalito to the bay where there are clouds so thick I cannot see the other side where I live with my family in Berkeley, my wife and son. But here there is no fog, only sun on your head and back, and the smell of everything under the nose: the dry grass and dirt; the cigarette smoke of the Chinese; the hot metal and exhaust of the passing automobiles. I am sweating under my shirt and vest. I have fifty-six years and no hair. I must buy a hat.

When I reach the truck, the crew has finished their water and the two Chinese light new cigarettes as they go back to the grass. The Panamanians have dropped their cups upon the ground around their feet and Tran is shaking his head, and saying something in his language as he stoops to pick them up with his hands. Mendez laughs. He is almost as big as the radish and there is a long burn scar the

color of sand upon one of his fat arms. He sees me looking at it as I drink my ice water and he stops his laughing, no longer does he even smile, and he to me says: "What you looking at, *viejo*?"

I drink from my cup and let him look at my eyes. His brothers have started to go back to work but now they stop to watch.

"Old *maricón*," says Mendez. He takes up his trash spear from the orange tailgate, but my eyes look at the burn again long enough for him to see. His face becomes more ugly than it already is and he yells something at me in his language and his teeth are very bad, like an old dog's. I don't give him rest from my eyes and so now he steps to me, yelling more, and I smell him, last night's wine and today's sweating of it, and now Torez is yelling louder than Mendez. Again it is in their mother tongue and it is over quickly because Mendez knows this crew can manage very fine without him, and he needs money for his sharob, his wine. He is *goh*, the shit of life. They are all *goh*.

"*Vamonos*, Camello." Torez moves by me and closes the tailgate. Tran is already working ahead of the truck while the smoking Chinese and the lazy Panamanians walk to the shade of the trees, pretending there is trash there.

I pull my sack over my shoulder and to Mr. Torez I say: "In my country I could have ordered him beaten."

"Sí, Camello? In Mendez's country he would have beaten you himself."

"I was colonel, Mr. Torez. I was colonel in the Imperial Air Force. Do you know this, Mr. Torez? I was a *colonel*."

He hands to me my garbage spear and looks me in my eyes. His are gavehee, brown as coffee, like all his people, like my people also. But I see he has made up his mind about me.

He says to me, to Genob Sarhang Massoud Amir Behrani: "Okay, Colonel, but today I'm Señor General. *Comprende*?"

At the lunch hour, Torez drives the highway truck down to the trees and we all remove our paper sacks from where we left them in the tool chest this morning. We eat in the shade. Many times Tran eats with me and I do not mind this because the little Vietnamese speaks no English and I am able to do my work in the classified pages