Bread upon the Waters

Frederick Smock
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At a bus-stop, in the Algiers district, across the river from the Cabildo, holy orders and Napoleon’s deathmask, nine o’clock in the dusty morning and already the streets are sweltering, two little girls, twins, perhaps, clad in matching frocks and beaded hair, sit whimpering beside an older woman, a woman old enough to be their grandmother, but who is, perhaps, their mother, and who looks away toward the horizon, the end of this world. An old man in a long coat passes by, and as he passes, he slips to each of the girls a candy out of his deep pocket, and—bread upon the waters—they are calmed. Their mother has missed this little miracle, and when she turns toward her girls, wondering, the old man is gone, has stepped onto a bus. I alone saw, but I’m not talking, because I also saw how the old man had long prepared himself for this moment, how he wished to pass by like an angel, a poor man, a thief.