

Shrapnel

By Víctor Rodolfo Jiménez

I had just emigrated,
and a bullet could come
for me very soon.

The family walls,
one after another,
fire, fire,
up, down.

Spoken words!
Even if you don't see the point —
fire, fire, up, down.
Words like shrapnel!
Words like shrapnel!
Spoken words!

Spare me the lecture, please,
I just arrived.
But they cannot help themselves.

“Be afraid, very afraid,” they said.
Be afraid of Blacks
around Grandma's house. You know?
Carol City is not a good neighborhood.

Be afraid of the police.
Be afraid of cops — they are crazy, son.
They can kick your ass anytime.
Be afraid, very, very, very afraid
of Cubans, the Marielitos —
many sell drugs.
Those crazy Marielitos!

Violence, you see, is the new norm.
Miami is being built
by cocaine traffickers.

Spoken words.
Words like shrapnel!
Words like shrapnel!
I hide. I try to shout.
But the litany continues.

They want to make sure
that I don't sell drugs,
that I don't have Black friends,
and to spare me some
close encounter of the third kind
with the police.

Just make sure
that nothing goes wrong!

Look, son!
Black people
are stirred up in Miami —
They are rioting
and damn furious!

Son, don't be afraid of the
old Jewish people kibitzing
in their Miami Beach buildings.
They are harmless.
But be careful!
Be afraid of their jokes!

Old people sitting on their porches
are the worst!

Words like shrapnel!
Words like shrapnel!
Things are not always
as they appear.
Be afraid!

Be very careful. Very afraid.
Fear, afraid, fear, afraid.
Fear, afraid — so much fear.

So much afraid!
Of the shrapnel of words.

Spoken words!