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Before Night Falls: A Memoir



Synopsis

The shocking memoir by visionary Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas "is a book above all about being free," said The New York Review of Books--sexually, politically, artistically. Arenas recounts a stunning odyssey from his poverty-stricken childhood in rural Cuba and his adolescence as a rebel fighting for Castro, through his suppression as a writer, imprisonment as a homosexual, his flight from Cuba via the Mariel boat lift, and his subsequent life and the events leading to his death in New York. In what The Miami Herald calls his "deathbed ode to eroticism," Arenas breaks through the code of secrecy and silence that protects the privileged in a state where homosexuality is a political crime. Recorded in simple, straightforward prose, this is the true story of the Kafkaesque life and world re-created in the author's acclaimed novels.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Before Night Falls," the autobiography of Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas, is an astonishing book. Arenas notes that he dictated part of the book into a tape recorder, and it was later transcribed by a friend. This format probably accounts for the book's intimate tone; I could imagine Arenas sitting in front of me and telling the whole story over coffee. The book has been translated into a forthright English by Dolores M. Koch. "Before Night Falls" begins with Arenas' childhood in rural Cuba. It details his life as a writer, his many sexual exploits as a gay man, and his sufferings under the regime of Fidel Castro. It is amazing to read how Arenas had to struggle to exist as a writer in a police state; he tells how he was forced to hide manuscripts and how friends smuggled his writings

out of Cuba for publication in foreign countries. The book contains many shocking and painful episodes, such as his accounts of his own imprisonment and exile. But his life story also contains moments of humor and hope. Particularly interesting are Arenas' accounts of his friendships with other gay Cuban writers, such as Virgilio Pinera and Jose Lezama Lima. Overall, the tone of the book reflects Arenas' many moods: sensuous, angry, joyful, outraged, wry, melancholy, and--above all--defiant. His writing is rich in colorful personalities and fascinating anecdotes. An interesting companion volume to Arenas' autobiography would be the book "Eminent Maricones: Arenas, Lorca, Puig, and Me," by gay Colombian-born writer Jaime Manrique. Manrique knew Arenas personally, and "Eminent Maricones" contains an account of Arenas' last days as he worked to complete "Before Night Falls" while dying of AIDS-related complications.

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