



# In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd

*Ana Menendez*

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## **In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd** Ana Menendez

Already sold in eight countries around the world, *In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd* is a hypnotic debut collection of linked tales about the attempts of immigrants to make new lives in America, by Cuban-American Pushcart Prize winner Ana Menendez. A lush, generous storyteller, Menendez effortlessly summons up grand, novelistic themes in her short stories: the hopes and disappointments of postrevolutionary Castro Cuba, the comfort and terror of Havana in all its beauty and sadness, the cultural ties that bind family, the contrast between people's dreams and reality. Seldom has an author captured so palpably the sting and regret of lives caught in the crosswinds of history. Menendez's prize-winning title story, a masterpiece of humor and heartbreak, introduces four aging Cubans who gather regularly to play dominoes in a Miami sidewalk park. More important than this game is their competition to tell the best joke of the day, and anecdotes fly about fellow countrymen who have immigrated for the American dream. In a wrenching twist, the ultimate joke strips bare the devastating truth that lies beneath the veneer of their game. From this opening story and its characters unfolds a series of family snapshots that illuminate the landscape of an exiled community rich in heritage and memory, and longing for the past. The tales are often at once comical and dark, as in "The Perfect Fruit," in which a mother is driven into an apocalyptic, frenzied cooking spree, using every last banana from the overgrown tree in her backyard; at other times they are deeply disturbing, as in "Miami Relatives," which depicts a family's escalating, surreal nightmare, fueled by the portrait and family stories of "the old uncle in Cuba" who refuses to die. With the subtle pacing of Lorrie Moore and the rich descriptiveness of Laura Esquivel, Ana Menendez charts her own territory from Havana to Coral Gables with unforgettable passion and explores whether any of us are capable, or even truly desirous, of outrunning our origins.

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