

Waiting for Snow in Havana - Confessions of a Cuban Boy Study Guide

**Waiting for Snow in Havana - Confessions of a Cuban
Boy by Carlos Eire**

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Plot Summary

Waiting for Snow in Havana is a memoir by Carlos Eire. When Eire is 11 years old, he and his brother Tony are sent by themselves to the United States to escape the oppression of Fidel Castro. He is among 14,000 other Cuban children who are exiled without their parents. Children do not need security clearances, so they can get in quickly. For the parents, it takes months or sometimes years. It will be three-and-a-half years before Carlos' mother finally gets to America. His father never will.

The book opens on New Year's Day of the year Eire is 8. Batista has fled that morning, and Castro is in power. For the next few years, Eire will continue to live in Cuba, but nothing is the same after that. The memoir is an account of his life in Cuba for a few years before and after the revolution. It touches briefly on what happens after he gets to the United States, but for the most part, Eire delves into his childhood memories of Cuba; full of lizards, turquoise water, firecrackers, bombs, car-surfing, and tangerine-colored sunsets.

Eire's father is a judge, and they live in the lap of luxury. They live in a museum-like house full of antiques, along with a chauffeur and maids, and Eire attends the same posh Catholic school as Batista's sons. It is not just the wealth that disappears. It is the freedom that quickly diminishes--freedom to watch movies, freedom to have pastries and cola, freedom to speak as one wishes.

Eire's father, a man who is convinced that he is the reincarnated Louis the XVI of France, knew from the beginning that Fidel would mean only trouble for the Cuban people. However, he never takes any action to leave the country when there is still time. Indeed, he never does leave the art collection that he cherishes. Eire does not understand this choice on the part of his father. It seems to him that the judge chose his things over his sons. However, it is also the judge who took Carlos, Tony, and all their friends car-surfing (driving through the surf when the waves were engorged from the storm), to Chinatown to buy firecrackers, and to the Miramar Theater to watch *The Vikings* over and over again.

Carlos' mother does not share the same sentiment as her husband does about staying. Indeed, it is she who finally makes the decision to leave the country with her two boys. It is she who makes all the arrangements and gets the paperwork in order, and it is she who sends her boys away and joins them over 3 years later. She also does not share the belief that she was Marie Antoinette in her past life.

The book is full of the sense of loss and longing for a life long-gone and a future promised but revoked. It speaks of the life that might have been, and the life he found instead.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Eight-year-old Carlos wakes up on New Year's Day and is told by his father that Batista has fled, and Fidel Castro is now in power. In this chapter his parents, his brother, his Aunt Lucia, his maid Inocencia, and her evil replacement, Caridad, are introduced. His parents are introduced as Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette because his father swears to remember that that's who they were in their past lives. As he is delivering the news of Batista's defeat to Carlos, Louis XVI is putting his trousers on over his shoes, the way he always puts them on. Carlos thinks about how he has tried to put his trousers on like this with no success. What he doesn't know is that Louis XVI wore very baggy trousers. To the 8-year-old Carlos, it is proof that he will never be like his father. The lizards, too, are introduced in this chapter. They are the impassive observers of the human drama that unfolds.

Chapter 1 Analysis

This chapter is used to explain the political situation in Cuba around which this book revolves. It also introduces his parents. By evoking images of the beheaded king and queen of France, Eire foreshadows the downfall of his family. This is the day the world changes for him, but he doesn't see the repercussions yet. Therefore, it is only fitting that in his eyes, his father is still the unattainable ideal for him. The ability to put on his trousers over his shoes is symbolic of his father's greatness. The lizards are a central motif in this story. They will appear time and time again. They are an integral part of Eire's Cuba, and despite his abhorrence of them, he cannot exclude them when he remembers his homeland.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

In this chapter Eire describes an incident that happened before New Year's Day that should have alerted him about the state of affairs. He, his parents, and his brother were on their way home from a bon voyage party for his mother's sister when a shootout starts near them. His mother becomes hysterical and demands that they all get out of the car and seek refuge at a house of an acquaintance nearby. As they are trying to get out of the car, a man runs toward them, grabs Marie Antoinette's arms and begs her to save him, for he is going to be killed. This is all very exciting for the boys, but the parents are not amused, and they shun him. The man gives Carlos a look like the one he sees in Jesus' eyes in his dreams and runs off. The acquaintances are home, and they let them in. The next day, they see a picture in the newspaper of the man after he'd been shot dead. His eyes are empty.

Chapter 2 Analysis

This scenario described in this chapter shows the state of unrest in 1958 Cuba. The feeling of anarchy is pervasive. Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette are intent on protecting themselves and their sons and view the strange man as a threat. Carlos, however, feels a sense of compassion for this stranger, even as he feels fear. Jesus' eyes in his dream beseech him to love all mankind as he loves himself. The stranger's eyes overlap in his mind with the eyes of Jesus, and this symbolizes his feeling of guilt in not being able to overcome his own self-love.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Carlos's father is a judge, and he is kind and mild mannered. The fact that he is fat lends to his air of softness, despite the fact that he has a very hard edge. He is a rarity as Cuban judges go, for he can be neither threatened nor bribed to work against justice. For this reason, Carlos' childhood is full of hexes. Sometimes, the boys accompany the judge to work. Carlos sits next to his father on the judge's bench as men kowtow to him. These same men fawn over Carlos, and he understands, even at a tender age the beauty of having power. Outside of his work, Louis XVI collects valuable art, including a plate with a picture of Jesus on it whose eyes would follow you wherever you went. Carlos calls this the Eye Jesus. There is also a portrait of the Empress Maria Theresa of which Carlos is terrified. To his consternation, his father will not get rid of this picture, despite Carlos' pleas. His father also makes beautiful dioramas out of seashells and coral, as well as beautiful kites out of tissue paper. He also indulges the boys in a sport called car-surfing. In the worst storms as many as seven boys pile into a car with the judge and drive through the huge waves.

Chapter 3 Analysis

This chapter reveals more details about Carlos' father as he saw him before Fidel. He was benevolent, powerful, and talented. He also takes them car surfing. Eire recognizes that such an adventure would be illegal in America, but in Cuba more adventure and more danger is allowed. It is a double-edged sword that affords a lot of thrills but also very little security. He sees the implication of this not just in car-surfing, but also among the poor. However, these are the insights he has as an adult. As a child, he appreciates only the fun and the privileges of being born a son of the judge. His fears revolve around spooky artwork. His adult self, however, sees this naive child and wants to warn him about the dangers of being lucky. The depiction of paradise is a foreshadowing of the fall to come. This chapter also acts as a contrast to the chapters to come when Carlos begins to feel critical of the judge who seems to care only about his collection and takes no action to save his family from Fidel.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

This chapter describes Carlos' school life. Carlos and Tony attend the private school run by the Christian Brothers. This is the most prestigious grammar school in Cuba, and all the wealthiest men send their sons here, including President Batista. Batista's bodyguards are present in force at the school, and Carlos believes that they are there to protect the Batista boys from bullies. Once, when he is in second-grade, Carlos finds out why they are there when the presidential palace is attacked, and dozens of police cars surround the school.

At this school, the sons of the most powerful men in Cuba are taught that Cuba is paradise, and there is no other place as lovely. Here, under the watchful eyes of the priests, boys torment and ridicule each other. The priests intervene only when they see blood. Here, because of his unwillingness to swear, Carlos is constantly tested and put at the bottom of a nebulous pecking order. One day, however, he is tormented by the son of Batista's chief henchman. Carlos punches him so quickly that the other boy does not have time to block the punch. He doubles over sobbing. Carlos worries that this boy will go home and tell his father to retaliate. He also starts to feel sorry for him. So he apologizes.

Here, also, the sons of the lords are taught that dirty thoughts are the worst sin ever. They are warned against looking at their chauffeurs' dirty magazines. This has a profound and unexpected effect on the first-grade Carlos. He begins to fear that all drivers are agents of the devil.

Chapter 4 Analysis

This chapter shows the multifaceted school life of Cuba's elite. Eire does not draw it to be a heavenly haven full of cherubic children and benevolent adults. The lives of the privileged children are full of cruelties and torture, both physical and mental. He does not mention even once about being enlightened. For all intents and purposes, school is a place where he learns to fear and learns to be proud. Despite what is being taught to them, they learn that they are number one and that everybody else is number two. So they laugh and look down at everybody else in the country. Eire remarks on the naivete of this attitude, in lieu of the events to come.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

This is the chapter about the pesticide Jeep. The pesticide Jeep drives down the streets spraying to kill the malaria-carrying mosquitoes. The spray is a beautiful bluish color. Carlos and his friends chase this Jeep and try to hang on to the back for as long as possible. Carlos' friend Eugenio is the champion and can hold on the longest.

There were four boys: Carlos, his brother Tony, Manuel, and Eugenio. The four of them create all kinds of mischief. They torment a homeless alcoholic, make prank calls, ring doorbells and run away, kill lizards, and shoot at buses with their BB guns.

One time, the older boys rub Carlos and Rafa's faces with red hot pepper and then throw them onto a fire ant nest and hold them there. The young boys are severely injured. When the mothers find out, the older boys are severely punished. However, the culprits go on to brag about it. Eventually, even the victims become proud of it and brag about it.

Eire as a father plays a game with his own children. Out of nowhere, he asks, "What is the Law?" a line taken from the movie *Island of the Lost Souls*. The children respond: "We shall not walk on all fours. We shall not drink blood." His own personal addition to this response is: "We shall not inhale poison." Eire does this because he knows that the children will one day realize that there is a beast within all of us and that we must keep it in line by cracking our own whips.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Eire recalls his childhood antics and those of his friends with much zeal, but he sees the dark side of it all. All the fun the children have comes at a cost either to them or to others. They taunt, steal, mutilate, and destroy for pleasure. They do not recognize the pesticide Jeep for what it is and latch onto it for fun. Even when they are the victims of a prank, if the prank is good enough, they derive pleasure from bragging about it. The child Carlos, therefore, is beastlike. Retrospectively, the adult Eire sees this characteristic and also recognizes that it has not disappeared. He realizes that as an adult the poison is less obvious but no less tempting, and he must remain very aware and strong.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Eire begins this chapter talking about a recurring dream of his childhood. In this dream, Jesus appears at the window as the family eats dinner. He just stares and stares as Carlos' family continues to eat unaware of His presence. He torments Carlos with his eyes and then suddenly disappears.

In this dream, Carlos sits in his father's usual chair, but when he is awake, he sits facing the other window, the window that faces Chachi's house. Chachi is the girl who lives next door and wears lipstick at the age of 6. Carlos' elders chide him relentlessly about how he is going to marry Chachi one day, and because of this, he comes to abhor her.

Once, when Carlos attends a party at Chachi's grandparents' house, and he plays with Chachi's cousins, Jorge and Julio, who are younger than Carlos. They start drinking champagne because the glasses are left unattended at a table. The world seems joyous and glorious. They are having a great time when Carlos says something that makes Jorge laugh so hard that he shoots champagne out of his nose. Promptly, their drunken state is discovered, and Carlos is carried out of the party by his father. Later, it is explained to him that getting drunk is a sin, and he must never do it again. Nevertheless, he is proud of this initiation into the adult world and proud of his ability to make Jorge spurt champagne through his nose.

Jesus continues to appear to him in his dreams, however, and these dreams occur at the opposite end of the joyous feelings he had when he was drunk: These dreams are frightening, and Carlos is certain that Jesus is trying to tell him something, but he does not know what. Only later, as an adult he hears one message loud and clear in his darkest moments. This message is that even the pain that he feels right now will quickly disappear, without leaving a trace, wiped away in the same way that Chachi's lipstick stain was that night he got drunk.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The Jesus dream is a recurring motif in this book. It is mentioned once before, when the fugitive begs for help. Throughout his childhood, Carlos is frightened by the appearance of Jesus. He is frightened because he is certain that Jesus wants to tell him something, but he does not know what the message is. He continues to dream the dreams, however, until he leaves Cuba.

Symbolically, the drunken state is held up as a contrast to the Jesus dreams. Being drunk, he does not even know that Chachi is kissing him, but everything seems fine and happy. However, this state cannot last, and the next morning, Carlos wakes up disappointed to find that the world is no longer the joyous place it was to him the night before.



As an adult, Eire continues to attempt to decode the Jesus dreams. Now with some experience of his own, he knows he understands one thing. Nothing is permanent. Eventually, everything ceases to exist, even the pain. This is a theme in the book. When Fidel assumes control, the physical things like houses, parks, and cars disappear. Also, the physical life disappears. In their stead, Carlos feels much heartache, but even that, Eire says, disappears.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

One of Carlos' neighbors, Gerardo Aulet is a nickel mine magnate. Aulet has turned his gardens into a zoo. There is a lion, a tiger, a panther, and a chimp. There are also birds, including a mynah bird that swears profusely. The chimp's name is Blackie, and Carlos and his cohorts taunt him mercilessly. Blackie lives in a tree house to which he is chained. One time Blackie escapes and finds Carlos when the boys are playing hide and seek in the Aulets' gardens. He hugs Carlos' legs and bites him in the behind.

Carlos remembers the pain of the hydrogen peroxide and the shame of having to pull his pants down in front of everyone, but he does not remember who recaptured Blackie. Carlos never taunts Blackie after that, and so it seems that Blackie gets his revenge. Blackie does escape time and time again after that, including once when he is wearing olive-green lederhosen.

When Fidel takes over, the Aulet house, like so many other houses, sits abandoned. The animals are gone, but Carlos does not know where. The cages where the birds used to live became habitats for some poor people. Eventually, the whole neighborhood will go to ruins and Gerardito, Aulet's son, will become a poor orphan the minute he steps onto American soil. Eire thinks that he does not care about what happened to all of these things, that they are things long lost in the past. However, a chimp puppet is the best man at his wedding, and he knows that he cannot bury his past as completely as he thinks he can.

Chapter 7 Analysis

As with the pesticide jeep, car-surfing, antique art, and dreams of Jesus, the vision of a chimp in olive-green lederhosen roaming around the streets of Havana is part of the bizarre events described in this book. This chapter further addresses the mindless cruelties of Carlos' childhood, only this time with a nice lesson at the end. It also continues with the theme of the impermanence of everything. The Aulets' bizarre zoo epitomizes the colorful, lively, neurotic life in Havana before Fidel. After Fidel, there are no cursing birds, no screeching chimps, no nickel magnate so rich that he has nothing to do but create a zoo of the absurd. All that is left are cages full of poor people.

Not only are the zoo and the house physically gone, but Eire claims that he no longer cares whether it exists or not. In fact, he says he wants to bomb it with dynamite if it still does. He wants to eliminate all artifacts from his past, but the appearance of the chimp puppet makes him wonder whether he is as ready to let go of his past as he thinks he is.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

This is a chapter about firecrackers. *Cohetes* is the Spanish word for them, a word that Eire feels expresses the power and beauty of firecrackers so much better. Carlos, Tony, and Louis XVI always go to Chinatown to get the firecrackers, for that is where they have the best ones. The firecrackers are all red, even the wrappers. Chinatown is full of scary things like large dragons and heathen deities, but the firecrackers made it worth the trips.

One time, the boys decide to try to send a chameleon up to space. They tie the lizard unto a bundle of firecrackers and light them. When the firecrackers explode, there is nothing left. Another time, Carlos picked up a firecracker that seems to be a dud, only to have it explode in his hand. He is rushed to an emergency room. He is treated and his hand is intact. By the end of the school year, he sheds the skin on his hand as lizards shed their skin, and underneath the hand is in perfect condition.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Firecrackers are another symbol of the colorful and dangerous, another item that befits the memories of childhood in Havana. In this chapter there is another example of childhood cruelties and senseless danger. Eire is layering the images one by one to recreate the Havana of his childhood. He is trying to capture the colors, the taste, the smell, the sound.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

This chapter is about parties. The children's parties in Cuba always include costumes and chaperoning mothers. There are pisatas, but they do not hit them with a stick like they do in Mexico. They have long ribbons attached to panels at the bottom that rip them open. There is no dancing either. Just games, cake, and presents. The whole affair is very Americanized, with Happy Birthday sung, American games, and cakes with American themes.

One time, Carlos is invited to a birthday party of Sugar Boy. Sugar boy's father owns the largest sugar company in Cuba. They are wealthy beyond words. The whole class is invited to his birthday party, and Carlos is in his class. On the day of the party, his mother breaks the news to him that she has forgotten to get Sugar Boy a gift, and it is too late to go to the toy store and buy something. She tells Carlos that they must find a gently used toy to give Sugar Boy. Carlos throws a fit, to no avail.

When Carlos arrives at party, he is astounded by the magnificence of the mansion, and all that surrounds it. He had been told before that some of his classmates are very wealthy, but until that day, he did not have a concept of this kind of wealth. Carlos is given a beautiful pop gun with a halter as a party favor at the beginning of the party. Then they are sent on a scavenger hunt to look for more party favors.

Chapter 9 Analysis

This scene is another example of life before Fidel. It shows the bounty and sheer luxury that existed in Cuba. The popgun that serves as a party favor symbolizes the pure bounty of this time for the children of Cuba's elite. Eire uses this chapter to show the life that was to evoke the life that might have been.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

This chapter opens with Louis XVI creating another house out of cardboard for the town of Bethlehem. Louis XVI remembers being there, and tells Carlos the story about how the window he is cutting out now is the one through which Herod's son threw his twin sons' corpses after he beheaded them.

At Carlos's home during Christmas time, a silent feud ensues because of the battle between Spanish tradition and American customs. The nativity scene that Louis XVI slaves over fights for attention with the Christmas tree Carlos' mother puts up. There really is no contest, however, for Santa Claus brings better presents than the Three Wise Men, and Carlos loves the Christmas tree.

Carlos does not like the Nativity scene because he thinks that the gifts of the Three Magi are terrible. He thinks that Jesus is a very unlucky baby to be born in a stable, receive horrible gifts, and end up on the cross. Carlos thinks that God is a deplorable father for leaving Christ crying, "Why have you abandoned me?" at the end of his life. He thinks that his father is not the same way, and that his father would do anything for him like the benevolent Santa Clause with the mountain of good presents.

As an adult, Eire sees the battle between the Nativity scene and Christmas tree differently. He sees that it is not just about tradition. The battle is between his mother and his father. The battle is over how to save Carlos and Tony from Fidel. His mother wants to take them to America. His father wants them to stay in Cuba. As with the battle over Christmas, their mother wins. Eire imagines his father as a deflated plastic Santa Claus. His father simply collapses under the pressure of his mother, all his powers gone.

Chapter 10 Analysis

This chapter begins to explain the dynamic that results in the exile of Carlos and Tony to America. It also shows how, ultimately, it is his mother who has the real power. His father, the all-powerful judge is, in reality, powerless when it comes to the fate of his two children.

In the same way that Carlos is disillusioned by finding out the truth about Santa Claus, Eire is disillusioned by his father. His father is supposed to be the great protector, but he does not protect the boys from becoming exiled orphans in America. He simply gives up on them. If he can't keep them in Cuba, he is unable to do anything more for them. It turns out that his father does leave Carlos and Tony at the cross crying, "Why have you abandoned me?"



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

One day, the boys are body surfing in huge waves. Carlos is swallowed by one and is tumbling in the green water when he ends up with his head in the sand and Ernesto, his detestable adopted brother, sitting on top of him. Just as he is about to pass out, the weight is removed, and someone pulls him out of the sand. When he recovers, he, too, laughs with the other boys about Ernesto's big butt. He also finds the scene so symbolic of his relationship with Ernesto that he offers it as his second proof of God. He does not, however, want to explain in detail yet why he hates Ernesto so much.

Carlos goes on to recount another story that he offers as the third proof of God. One day he is at church with his mother, father, and brother. Church is boring, but at this particular church, he notices that the pews do not have solid backs, but instead have numerous round openings. So he stares at the pattern, trying to make sense of it when he is drawn to put his round head into one of the round holes. He stays there mesmerized for a while, and nobody notices him. When it's time for communion, however, he cannot get out. His head is stuck. His father pulls and turns Carlos' head, but to no avail. It only causes him pain. Finally, with advice from Marie Antoinette, Louis XVI gets Carlos' head out. Eire says that a head in a pew so perfectly expresses our primal need to transcend linear logic that it must be a proof of God. The chapter ends with a call to abandon thinking and just imagine the sounds of a boy in side a giant wave, the sound of a boy screaming with his head in the sand, the sound of a head trapped in a paradox, and for Cubans, a sound of memories that have nothing to do with Batista or Fidel.

Chapter 11 Analysis

This chapter has nothing to do with Batista or Fidel. It describes singular moments when the world makes complete sense. It makes sense that Ernesto is sitting on Carlos' head that's buried in the sand, it makes sense that Carlos' sticks his head in the round opening of a church pew, and the sight he sees from there makes sense. As absurd as these scenes are, to Carlos, these moments are proof that his perception of the world and God's perception of the world are one. The fact that Fidel comes and takes everything away from the people and the fact that Carlos is left to fend for himself in America do not make sense. These things make him question God. Anything that has to do with Fidel makes him question the existence of God, which is why he calls out to the Cuban people to imagine sounds that have nothing to do with Fidel or Batista for only then can God be felt.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

This chapter is about Aunt Carmela. Aunt Carmela is a relative from Carlos' father's side, a Nieto. She lives in a huge, creepy house that Carlos hates to visit. There are, for example, two modern abstract sculptures that scare him to death. There is also a giant statue of Saint Lazarus, the patron saint of lepers.

Aunt Carmela herself is, however, the only Nieto to live her life to the fullest. She fought for causes, played hard, and took care of the needy. She also wrote. She wrote fiction and newspaper articles about her cause. Then she married an American. They have three children: Daisy, Archie, and Addison. Then she fell in love with another man who was married to another woman. Carmela became pregnant with his child. The American packs his bags and leaves. He disowns Carmela and his three children. Carmela and the other man eventually marry and have two children of their own, but Carmela is disowned by the entire Nieto clan. For years, only Louis XVI keeps in touch with her furtively.

Carmela did not let this get in the way of enjoying her life. She also becomes fabulously wealthy. How she accomplishes this is unknown but undeniable. It is eventually the child, Carlos, who plays the peacemaker between Carmela and the Nieto family. His insistence on meeting Carmela forces King Louis to visit her openly. Shortly thereafter, the entire Nieto family follows suit.

Aunt Carmela eventually dies in her mansion surrounded by her sons, Carlos' parents, and the statue of Lazarus. Her sons continue to live in the mansion until their deaths. Eire does not know the fate of the mansion or of Lazarus after that. Lazarus remains a frightening memory, however. He contemplates the fact that because he did not grow up with the things that scared him as a child, they remain spooky to him and sometimes surface in dreams.

Sometimes, though, good things surface in dreams, too, to help him heal. One such example is when his father visits him in his dreams. During his last visit, he tells Eire that he is finally at peace, and he forgives Eire for every bad thought he's ever had and ever will of his father. He tells him that pain is an illusion that eventually disappears. In his dreams, Eire knows he is sleeping and missing out on the visit from his father. He begs his father to come back when he is awake. His father's response is, "You're awake son. More awake than ever." Then he vanishes.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Aunt Carmela's story is about how foolish it is for people to judge and hold grievances against each other. Life is too short, and it is a senseless loss for people to stay estranged from loved ones, just because they do not agree with the choices that were



made. In retelling this story, Eire realizes his own senselessness to feel estranged from his father who died so long ago. In dreaming about him, and in retelling his dreams, he attempts to reconcile his anger. As an adult, it is not as easy to make peace. For the child, Carlos, it was all much simpler. However, Eire struggles with his own grievances, aware that there is no gain in holding on to the past.

This chapter begins as a tribute to Aunt Carmela for her exemplary way of life that Eire obviously respects, but in the end, it is a tribute to his father, and a tribute to the love that still exists between them, despite all the anger, the fear, and the years.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

It is appropriate that Chapter 13 is a chapter about luck, but Eire does not want to talk about his own luck, for that might bring bad luck. In this chapter, he talks about the luck of his ancestors. He chooses thirteen items to talk about. For example, his great-great grandmother was chased out of Mexico during the Mexican Revolution, fled to Cuba and lost everything. This woman arrived in Cuba and married a Spanish army officer who had been fighting against the Mexicans for 10 years. Captain Nieto was given some land in Cuba, so he decided to stay, and the two of them raised a family of army officers. One of the sons was Carlos' grandfather, Amado, who met his wife while watching her house burn down. This house belonged to his wife's father, who had won the top prize in the Spanish lottery three times. Amado eventually died after licking an envelope and cutting his tongue on the edge, and the wound became infected. Amado means, "The Beloved."

On Eire's mother's side, one of his great-great-great-great-grandparents was chased out of Ireland to remain Catholic. They, too, lost everything, but one of the sons married a woman who owned a lot of property. This property stayed in the family until Eire's grandfather fell in love with the wrong girl and was disowned. His name, incidentally, was Amador, which means "lover."

Chapter 13 Analysis

Eire contemplates his family's strange luck, both good and bad. It seems that they have had an overabundance of both. They gain, only to lose. Both the gaining and the losing seem ludicrous. The theme of this chapter is the impermanence of everything. He also mocks the human drama.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Carlos practices for his first confession. One of his childhood sins is that he steals toys. His parents decide that making him return the goods and apologize for stealing will cure him of this evil habit. The first time, they send him in to do it by himself. This does not work, for he just lies and tells them he did as instructed. The second time, his parents go in with him. This experience is mortifying enough for him enough that he never steals again. Even upon his arrival in America, when he becomes so poor he hardly has enough to eat, he is never tempted to steal.

Chapter 14 Analysis

The themes of this chapter are sin and repentance. The stealing is symbolic of concrete sins. Eire sees though, that the real sins are not so concrete, and not so easily curable. He sees that even after his confession where he wore white and felt so white afterwards at a party given at the country club, his sin of pride had not even been addressed. He is proud of being part of the Havana elite, a sin that will be cured not by confession but by Fidel and America. His sins as an adult are equally as nebulous and dark, having to do with desiring things that he ought not desire.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

The Nieto family is obsessed with death. They regularly hold syances and lecture their youth on how to take care of the family pantheon. Ghost stories abound in Carlos' life. They fear things that cause death like strokes and cramps and take all kinds of precautions against them . . . like not swimming for hours after eating.

Paradoxically, the children are allowed to play with firecrackers and have rock fights. One time, the dreaded Ernesto, who usually did not partake in the rock fights (and was, hence, inexperienced), partook and was hit on his nose. His nose was broken, and it gushed with blood. He never will breathe the same.

Chapter 15 Analysis

The theme of this chapter is death. At one point, Louis the XVI says to Carlos, "Death is always around the corner, always ready to surprise you." Eire sees how naive he was as a child, not seeing how close death really is.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Since coming to America, Eire has been seeing clouds that are shaped like Cuba. These always take him by surprise, and they feel ominous to him. He sees one just as his son comes to head-butt him in the stomach, his daughter sneers, and his other daughter smiles. Just at the moment that he wishes would never end, he sees a Cuba cloud, and knows that every moment in life that is wonderful will end.

Chapter 16 Analysis

The clouds symbolize impermanence. Everything in his youth, his life in Cuba, everything he had and was supposed to have, is gone. Every moment, even this moment in America, so far away from his Cuban childhood, will be gone. He does not know where they came from, and he does not know where it will go.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Carlos is afraid to eat dark things because he thinks it will turn him into a black person. Even as a child, he sees that in Cuba, black people have to do all the real work and that their lives are inferior in quality. The thought of turning black is more frightening to him than even the nightmares caused by his father's collectible candlestick of a female figure.

It is, indeed, not black food that will usurp the privileges of a white boy. It is the 45-minute plane trip that will turn him into a "Hispanic." Upon landing in America, he will be the one who does all the dirty work; he will be the one with the inferior lifestyle, and he will be the one who has nothing.

Chapter 17 Analysis

The theme of identity is dealt with in this chapter. The fears of childhood and the reality of the future are juxtaposed. He has the unique experience of being on both sides of the racial divide. He is at first white and privileged and then not. His childhood intuition tells him that he should fear losing his "whiteness," but his naivete triggers his belief that avoiding dark food will protect him. Our identity is largely based in the society we live in, and even though Carlos' skin tone has not changed at all, his identity changes when his environment changes. This experience acutely portrays the problem with racism.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Eire talks about his Aunt Lucia, his father's sister. She apparently has no desires. As boys, Carlos and Tony view Lucia only as the woman who buys them their comic books on Wednesday. As it turns out, she is the owner of the house they live in, but she has relinquished the domain to them and lives in a back room. She never went to a university or had a job until her mother died, after which she worked in an upscale boutique selling nice clothes to rich women.

Eire cannot believe that she never had desires, but the only time he can remember seeing it on her face was when he would bring her McDonald's milkshakes when she was 90. By then, she was living in a nursing home in the worst neighborhood in Chicago. She had left Cuba at the age of 76 because she could not stand what was going on there. She came to live with Carlos and his mother. Eire thinks that that fact that she would do something so radical must be a sign that she has some desire somewhere hidden deep down.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Eire compares his own selfish desires as a child and as an adult to his aunt. He reflects on the sense of entitlement he felt, even toward the comic books she gave him. His aunt never asked for anything or claimed anything. According to Carlos' mother, she never even had friends or beaux. Her cousin, Addison, was her only friend.

In an earlier chapter, Eire explores his desire to have the life that was promised to him, and his anger at having that taken away. He contrasts it to his aunt's life, which seems to be the complete opposite. He does not hold her up as a model, but only examines it in complete bewilderment. Even as he discusses her absolute lack of desires, he cannot help but express what he would have wanted for her . . . to be able to die in the house that belonged to her and not in a nursing home in Chicago.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

The chapter talks about the time Carlos and Tony were playing hockey with Carlos' shoe. The shoe broke Louis XVI's display case and got stuck in an 18th century cup. He was belted for it. Everyday was judgment day at the house of the judge.

At school, Carlos's third grade teacher always discussed the horrors of hell. He also punished the whole class for a misdemeanor when the culprit was not found. The whole class was forbidden to leave the room until the culprit was identified. One day, this caused Carlos to wet his pants.

Carlos also read in a magazine once that Judgment Day was coming in the year 2000. In fear, he began silently inspecting the sky. He did not think that his demise would come from the skies, but from the mountains in the form of Fidel.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Throughout Carlos's childhood, he lived in fear of his father, his schooling, and the prophecies. The reality is closest to what his home life was. Judgment shall be every day, both fair and unfair, merciful and cruel. There is no algorithm; there is no rule; there is no way to ward off punishment. The judge's home then, is symbolic of the real world.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Christmas Eve of 1958 is the last time Christmas is as it should be. There is no Ernesto, there is still the Christmas dinner at Carlos' grandparents' house, and there is the perfect ride home. Underneath all this peace, however, trouble is brewing. The events that would soon put Fidel in control, send Carlos and Tony to America to fend for themselves, and bring Ernesto his inheritance of the house were already under way.

By Christmas Day, there was a strange man at the door asking to use the phone because someone was digging a hole to plant a bomb. The Nietos did not let him in. Fidel was close to victory, and the rebels would take over Cuba within a few days, but they did not know that. Carlos' only preoccupation that Christmas morning was that he had been given his brother's old bike, which his parents tried to disguise with a fresh coat of paint.

Chapter 20 Analysis

The reality Carlos knew, and the one he didn't know, are shown. Eire grapples with the incomprehensibility of it all. How could one day seem so perfect even as everything was already being undermined? The theme of the chapter is fate, an unknown fate. Christmas is symbolic because it is the birthday of Jesus, whose fate was preordained, even as his birth was rejoiced.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Carlos is in Chicago, after leaving Cuba. Tony works two jobs, but has dropped out of school. Carlos goes to school during the day, and then goes to work. He has no time to study, but the racist guidance counselor placed him in lower-tier classes despite his high test scores, so he does fine in school. Their mother has joined them, but in a foreign country where she doesn't speak the language, she is the one who must be taken care of. It took her 3 years to join her boys finally, and by this time, they have grown and are more capable of taking care of themselves than she is.

Among the atrocities of life in Chicago are knife-like winds, whooping cough, poverty, other Latinos in social service agencies who do more harm than good, racism, and a pervert on the train. One night, Carlos is riding the train when a man sits next to him, fondles Carlos' knee for 10 minutes, and gets off. Carlos is too terrified to stop him and too ashamed to tell anyone. He does not tell his mother for fear of breaking her heart. He curses Fidel for replacing his life in Cuba with this one.

Chapter 21 Analysis

The Chicago winter is symbolic of Carlos' life after Fidel. If Cuba is the tropical paradise, Chicago is the antithesis. There is no sun, no warmth, no play, no kindness only backbreaking work, disease, and perverts. Even his mother, who is supposed to provide maternal protection, is powerless in Chicago. She is unable to work, speak the language, or even provide a decent doctor to diagnose the whooping cough correctly. There is no redemption for a Chicago winter.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

The Cuban people are still unaware of how destructive Fidel would be. Carlos' mother watches Fidel's first speech where doves are released and says it must be a sign. Louis XVI sees more than she does. He sees that the birds defecate on Fidel and knows that this is the real sign. As for Carlos, he is just fascinated with bullets that can be acquired from guys wearing fatigues. He is also busy falling in love with Marilyn Monroe, Kim Novak, and Eva Marie Saint. He knows that there are people being shot at on the wall, but isn't too concerned. He is 8, and his world is still the same. Only his father knows, even then, that something is horribly wrong.

Chapter 22 Analysis

The bullets are symbolic of the mass killing that is going on, but Carlos and his friends can see only their shiny beauty. The doves are propaganda, evoking forthcoming peace. Nobody sees the details of what they do. In talking about the three blondes that he falls in love with, Eire shows how preoccupied they all are with the other things that go on in life. He shows how blind they all make themselves so they will not have to face reality. Only Louis XVI sees what is coming. Later in the book, this makes Eire question his father even more. If he knew, what excuse does he have for not having done something to protect them? Why did he insist on passively allowing his children's lives to be ruined? An important theme in this book is the anger he feels toward his father for not having done what fathers are supposed to do, protect their children.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Eire talks about the movie *The Viking* starring Tony Curtis and Kirk Douglas, a movie Carlos watches over and over the summer of 1959. In his words, the world has not changed too much in Havana. Men are being killed, of course, shot against the wall, but other than that, life goes on as it always has.

Carlos finds out years later that one of his relatives had been killed against the wall. The lore has it that in the moments before his death, this relative "grabbed his crotch with his right hand, though his arms were bound around his chest, and shouted, 'Shoot me here first *maricones!* Shoot this!'"

Carlos compares this way of facing death to that of the Viking way. While the Vikings invoke their god Odin, the Cuban way would be to say, "Go to hell, you fags, I'm going to die like a man."

Carlos did not find this out until he was 41 years old. He feels that if he had known this, his life would have been different.

Chapter 23 Analysis

In the movie, Kirk Douglas gains the upper hand against his own half-brother (played by Tony Curtis) and is just about to gain the hand of his love. At that moment, he hesitates too long so that Tony stabs him in the gut with his sword stump. Eire interprets this hesitation as Kirk suddenly seeing the danger of his own desires. Just when all his desires are about to be fulfilled, just when everything that he has fought for is about to come to him, he hesitates. Eire thinks that at that moment, Kirk Douglas invoked to the Viking god Odin, "Help me let go, Odin, grant me *gelassenheit*. Rid me of desire, rid me of passion." And Odin granted Kirk's prayer.

Eire says that Kirk Douglas is lucky to be able to let go of his burning passions and desires, but he says that he cannot because he is a Cuban, and Cubans don't pray for *gelassenheit* at the moment before their death; they curse at their executioner. He says this with mock despair, but there is, of course, pride when Eire quotes, "*I yam what I yam.*"

The theme in this chapter is, once again, desire. The Vikings are symbolic of how the northern coolness affects even the handling of desire. The Cubans, in contrast, are like the sun they soak so much of. Cooling off is not an option.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Carlos and Tony are transferred to another school because the school they attend is too closely connected to the Batistas, and their father fears for their safety. The school that he attends for his third-grade year, however, is horrible, and he is ostracized. His father's arrival at school 2 days after he tells him does not improve the situation. A number of his classmates have been disappearing overnight. They are leaving, but Carlos' family is staying. Eventually, at the end of that year, his parents tell them that they will get to choose the next school they want to go to. They choose a co-ed school.

Meanwhile, in the outside world, Fidel is sweeping up all the "undesirables." The beggar woman and her son, who used to sit right outside the church and whom Carlos used to hate seeing so much, disappeared. Fidel is also silencing opponents with an iron fist. The Coca-Cola and Pepsi tastes horrible now because even though Fidel forced the owners to turn over the plants, they could not be forced to turn over their recipes. . . . Even though the bottles are right, what is in them is not.

On the night of the feast of Saint Anne, however, Carlos does not care about these things. There are fireflies and candles, as the well-to-do stroll down the avenues. Retrospectively, Eire looks back and imagines Saint Anne's reaction to this procession. She is, of course, pleased, because saints like processions, but she is puzzled by how the flames dance for these Cubans the way they do not for other people. The music she hears comes from the atmosphere and their bodies. The drums are so loud, and there are other flashes of light all over the city: explosives from the young men rebelling against Fidel. She looks down and understands that the fireflies, the parties, the candles, the bombs, and the music are all connected, and this makes her weep even as she smiles.

Chapter 24 Analysis

The lights are symbolic of life. There are different kinds of light in this chapter: the fireflies, the candles, and the bombs. They seem all independent, but Eire concludes that they are all one and the same. They are born of the same desire for life. Even as the world changes around them, the fireflies keep lighting up, the well-to-do keep lighting their candles and strolling down the avenue, and the rebels continue to set off bombs every night. Children are disappearing with their parents, Cola doesn't taste the same, men are being killed against the wall, streets are being swept clean of beggars, and yet these lights are still bright and lit for Saint Anne to see.



Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

Carlos loves the movies, and he has been seeing *The Viking*, *20,000 Leagues under the Sea*, *Nautilus*, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, and *Queen of Outer Space* over and over again. One day in 1960, his father takes Carlos and his friends to see *20,000 Leagues under the Sea*, but he is told that no minors can see this movie. His father's questions are not answered, and he is told only that it is forbidden for children to watch this movie now.

This is the day that it occurs to Carlos that something has gone awfully wrong with the world. To comfort the boys, Louis XVI takes them to Tropicream, where they can get milkshakes. These shakes, too, will eventually disappear, but they are still here that day. Carlos always gets the mamey fruit shake because the color is a crazy pink and red, and the taste is out of this world. What he doesn't know is that the pit of the mamey fruit contains a hallucinogenic substance and that must have somehow gotten into the shakes. He attributes this to the fact that he usually feels smarter and understands the world more keenly after a mamey shake. On this day, however, he does not understand Fidel any better after the mamey shake.

Chapter 25 Analysis

This chapter is the first chapter in which Carlos becomes aware of the effects of Fidel. The American movies are symbolic of the freedom he enjoyed before Fidel and lost after Fidel. To a child, it is not men dying against the wall that is reality. It is the inability to see a favorite movie that awakens in him the sense that the world is no longer what it should be. Even a Mamey shake cannot make it better. The theme of this chapter is the loss of innocence. Until now, even though Fidel has been in power, bombs are going off, children are disappearing from school, and even Cola doesn't taste the same, Carlos still exists in a cocoon-like world. With the loss of his movies, however, he sees in a sudden bolt of understanding, the bigger picture of all that is wrong in a world where Fidel dictates what can and cannot be.



Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

Carlos' Cousin Fernando is one of the rebels fighting against Fidel. At one time, he was part of a plan to kill Fidel, and he would have, except that the guy who was supposed to open the hangar arrived late because of car trouble, supposedly. Eventually, it is because of a stupid error that Fernando gets caught.

One night, Fernando is driving in a car with seven other guys and a trunk full of weapons. Ten blocks away from the drop-off, the light threatens to turn yellow. Not wanting to be caught by the police at a red light with eight guys and weapons in one car, Fernando tries to drive through the yellow light. The police, of course, see this and become suspicious. Fernando stalls them as long as possible, blabbering about being late to a wedding, and he allows the other guys to run away as far as possible.

Fernando would have been killed against the wall if it weren't for the chance fact that he was born in Spain, not in Cuba. The Spanish government put enough pressure on the Cuban government that the sentence was lessened. He was given a 30-year sentence instead of death.

In the end, Fernando served 23 of those years. He is tormented constantly and pressured to "reform," but he does not. He continues to crack jokes and make all the other inmates laugh. Fernando is finally released, and 31 years after his imprisonment, he surprises Eire at a family gathering. Eire does not recognize him until Fernando introduces himself. Eire is speechless.

Chapter 26 Analysis

While Carlos is just a little boy when Fidel assumes control, this chapter provides insight into what it must have been like to be a young man at the same time. Fernando is a heroic figure in this book, first for the life-risking missions he undertook, then for not breaking under pressure, and finally for triumphing, being released from jail, and getting to America.

Fernando symbolizes courage, integrity, loyalty, and the ability to maintain a good sense of humor even in the direst of situations. He symbolizes triumph in the truest sense of the word. He did not lose himself, even under the worst kind of oppression.



Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

Carlos and Tony are now attending the co-ed school. He has a beautiful female teacher, and in February falls in love with the girl who sits to the right of him. In this school there is a ritual that when the other kids find out that someone loves someone else, the lovers are pushed toward each other and into each other on the playground. There is mass chanting as the boys push the boy and the girls push the girl until they meet and are forced to hug and kiss each other. Usually, it is your best friend who betrays you.

When Carlos confesses this to his best friend Ciro, within a couple of days, this is his fate. He can't remember anything that actually happens at the center, but by then, it is March, and the school is shut down by April. This is the year when everything truly changed for the children of the revolution. Bombs fall from the sky, bullets fly, money disappears, people disappear, and even Carlos starts to feel that his own existence might be in jeopardy. Of all the horrible memories of that time, however, what he remembers most vividly is still the way this girl's hair was cut in such a straight, straight line.

Chapter 27 Analysis

Even though Fidel destroys society by tearing everybody apart, he is still unable to rob Eire of the beautiful memory of Carlos' first crush. The girl's hair is symbolic of beauty. Even the worst atrocities in life cannot take away the human appreciation for beauty. Once again, there is always contrast. In Cuba, no matter how horrible life is getting to be, there is always a compensating beauty that allows Carlos to forget, even for just a moment, all that is not right. In a previous chapter about Chicago, this is not the case.



Chapter 28

Chapter 28 Summary

There are children who wear red berets and red neckerchiefs marching like little soldiers. They are the Pioneers. Carlos and his friends always shout derogatory comments to these mini-soldiers as they walk by. One day, his mother catches them and later she will tell him that this moment convinced her to get them out of the country.

During those days, there were many rumors, and one of them was that the state was herding children into trucks and shipping them to unknown places. When she hears the boys being disrespectful to the regime, she is certain that they will one day say it to the wrong person and get sent off to Russia.

Life is really changing in Cuba now. The Chinese hot dog man with the world's best hot dog is gone. The Jamaican pastry man with his delicious pastries is gone. Carlos' uncle loses his furniture store. Everybody has lost real estate. Money is gone. All the banks are closed, and all accounts are seized. The currency is changed, so anything you are holding is now worthless.

Chapter 28 Analysis

When people were being killed against the wall, the reality of the changing world is not comprehensible. The first awakening that the lack of freedom would affect their lives came with not being allowed to see a movie. People started to disappear, but then the hot dogs, the pastries, and the money were taken away. It is as if only by losing the details can we see how drastically the world is changing. The death of people he does not know and the disappearance of his school friends are too broad and too abstract for a child to comprehend. When something as concrete as hot dogs and movies disappear, however, the magnitude of the situation hits Carlos.



Chapter *#%\$+!

Chapter *#%\$+! Summary

Eire finally tells us why he and Tony hate Ernesto so much. Ernesto found every opportunity to try to sexually molest them. He stopped only after Carlos got big enough to punch him hard. Carlos and Tony did not have enough faith in their father. They thought that perhaps he might not believe them, so they never told their parents.

Chapter *#%\$+! Analysis

Eire regrets not having trusted his parents enough to have told them the truth. Mostly, though, he feels anger at Ernesto. The theme of this chapter is unforgivable anger, but confession at the same time. For the first time, Eire is facing the demon of his childhood, the shame of being molested by an older boy.



Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

It is the beginning of the Invasion. Armed exiles invade from Florida to regain Cuba. They land at the Bay of Pigs. The Invasion fails. President Kennedy withdraws support when it is too late, leaving the men stranded at the Bay of Pigs. Eventually, these invaders, called the Worms by Fidel and his regime, are exchanged for \$53 million in medicine and food.

Years later, when Tony and Carlos live in an orphanage in Florida, they see President Kennedy and Jackie Kennedy at the Orange Bowl. The Worms are also there, and the First Lady gives a speech in flawless Spanish about how these men are heroes, and the flag of Brigade 2506 will one day wave over a free Cuba.

That night, Tony and Carlos are euphoric. They speak of returning home to Cuba soon, with this life of living in an orphanage that smells of cod being in the past. They are still optimistic and believe President Kennedy.

Thirty-seven years later, Eire is lying awake in his comfortable home, and he tries to imagine what his life might have been if the Invasion had gone as planned. He sees a sweeter life for him, the life that was meant for him, home in Havana, putting Brylcreem in his hair, and dancing the night away. He knows that life is not that simple, however. He loves the life he has led, the bad parts and the good, and life cannot be separated cleanly.

Chapter 29 Analysis

The theme of this chapter is destiny. The Invasion of the Bay of the Pigs was destined to be something completely different than what it was. If it had gone as planned, Carlos' life and his family's life would have been completely different. He never would have had to leave Cuba.

Carlos thinks of this, and he thinks of what his life might have been. He imagines that his life would have been sweeter, but at the same time he knows that he loves every part of the life that he has actually led, and he wouldn't exchange any part of it for something else.



Chapter 30

Chapter 30 Summary

Children do not need security clearances to enter the United States, and they are given visa waivers. The parents have to wait many months for their visas, sometimes a year or more. Thousands of families are doing this. Carlos' mother also makes the decision that her children will also leave the country as soon as possible by themselves. As the children wait for the exit permits, they spend the days in limbo. They don't go to school, and they play furiously. During the day, Carlos is fine, but at night, he is seized with terror and nightmares. Most nights, he creeps into his parents' bed.

Carlos' parents are not in accord about this decision. It is Marie Antoinette's decision, so Louis XVI will do nothing to make it happen. She is the one who makes it all happen. She figures out all the paperwork, she gets their passport pictures taken, and she has the special bags made for them. The bags are big enough to fit only those things that can be carried with them because of the weight restriction for their baggage that comes down to ounces.

Carlos' father, meanwhile, does nothing. For this reason, 16 years after Carlos saw his father for the last time, he converted his father's surname to a middle initial and then took his mother's surname, Eire, as his surname.

Chapter 30 Analysis

Carlos' final days in Cuba are full of languid play during the day, in contrast with the nightmares at night. It is also about his mother's determination to save her children, in contrast to his father's passivity. His father did nothing, one way or another, and Eire resents his father for this. He identifies with his mother, who did everything that she needed to do to save her sons. His decision to change his surname to his mother's surname is symbolic of his feeling.



Chapter 31

Chapter 31 Summary

This chapter is about sharks in a swimming pool. The Aquarium of the Revolution has been established in a seaside house. They filled the seaside pool with salt water and numerous sharks. The diving board is still in place, as if to tempt someone to jump into the pool of sharks.

Sixteen years later, in Minnesota, Eire is swimming in an Olympic-sized pool, and is suddenly seized with the fear that the pool is full of sharks. Only the entrance of a diver on the board is able to dispel this fear. Two years after that, he meets a woman to whom he confides his secret fear, and she tells him that she has been haunted all her life by the very same image, even though she has never seen a pool full of sharks. She becomes his wife.

Chapter 31 Analysis

The theme of this chapter is about latent fear. Eire says that once you have seen a pool full of sharks, you are never the same. The sharks are symbolic of all his other fears. While his other fears are rather abstract, the fear of sharks is very concrete. His fears, however, can also bring him good things like his wife.



Chapter 32

Chapter 32 Summary

There is another molester in Carlos' childhood. The year he lives in limbo without going to school, a man with a dog approaches him and Jorge. He tricked the boys to come with him while he urinated. He had Jorge stand guard and had Carlos at knife-point, commanding him to touch his penis. If it weren't for the local drunk, who started screaming from nearby, this molester would not have jumped and loosened his grip enough to let Carlos run away from him.

At first, Carlos didn't tell his mother, but eventually he did. His mother said all the things a mother should have at that point and scolded him for not having told his parents sooner. She said his father, as a judge, could have had him locked up. They found the dog that belonged to the man, but the people who bought it from him didn't know who he was or where he'd gone.

Chapter 32 Analysis

Once again, Eire is facing the past that he has avoided through denial for a long time. He also realizes that his fear of this molester is profound, especially because of the timing of the incident. He is just about leave for America by himself with no one to protect him from this evil man.



Chapter 33

Chapter 33 Summary

One day, while the boys are waiting for their exit visas, the breadfruit on the tree next door ripens. The fruit falls all over the yard. Carlos and his friends start to throw a few at each other, and then suddenly they are unstoppable. They throw one after another, and the insides of the breadfruit ooze all over the place. Eventually, they spill out of the yard, onto the street. The rules of the game change, and they start to use the walls as forts, and it is more akin to a trench war. They throw all of their rage and frustration with the fruit.

When the boys run out of ammunition, they go home and clean up, pretending that nothing happened. Soon, the phone starts to ring with complaints from the neighbors. The boys clean the mess up without a complaint. To be able to throw the breadfruit with so much abandon is worth the hard work of cleaning it up.

Years later, when Eire finds rage welling inside of him, he remembers that breadfruit war.

Chapter 33 Analysis

Breadfruit is smelly and gooey. It is neither delicious, nor fit to eat until the Revolution reduces Ernesto and Louis XVI to eating them. In the midst of dread, chaos, and anger, however, it becomes invaluable in its therapeutic power. The breadfruit is symbolic of the beauty that can be found in even the most unlikely of places. Even a smelly fruit can lead to a sweet memory from a time of rage. There is always potential for sweetness.



Chapter 34

Chapter 34 Summary

Louis XVI, ever eager to give the boys what gives them pleasure, makes peashooters for the boys by cutting up old television antennas. The metal cylinders are thin and 12 inches long. Peas are not rationed at the moment, so he gets them each a bag of peas, and they all head out to the new park. The new park is an urban development project of the Revolution. At this park, the boys enjoy shooting people with their peashooters. Suddenly they discover a woman with the biggest butt any of them has ever seen. They line up and shoot her at the same time. It was five of them. She is so outraged that she lunges at them and starts yelling at the top of her lungs. She finds the boys with the judge and starts yelling at him. The boys leave the judge to defend them.

Louis XVI reprimands the boys later but without a hint of anger. He sounds merely sad and worried when he says not to do it ever again. Both he and the boys know that there never will be a next time.

Chapter 34 Analysis

This is one of their last desperate attempts at fun before the boys are sent to America. There is a sense of anarchy. The play war symbolizes the feeling of rage and frustration within them. Louis XVI protects them from the rage of this woman, and it will be the last time he is able to protect them. The boys will go to America soon.



Chapter 35

Chapter 35 Summary

Carlos, Rafael, Manuel, Tony, Louis XVI, and Ernesto witness a school of parrot fish swimming in the turquoise blue sea. Hundreds and thousands of parrot fish swimming together. It looks like a moving rainbow with splashes of tangerine, blood-red hibiscus, and sunset. It is beautiful, and can be no less than a miracle.

Carlos wonders whether this is a farewell vision of everything that is beautiful in his birthplace, and whether wrapped up in this vision is all the truth, beauty, goodness, eternity, and love, dancing with the sharks.

Chapter 35 Analysis

The school of parrot fish is symbolic of beauty even when the world seems bent on showing that there is no beauty left in the world. It is beauty like this that suggests the resiliency of life, even when all else is lost.



Chapter 36

Chapter 36 Summary

Carlos goes to a beautiful, palatial home with a grand staircase to see movies. The mansion includes a beautiful pool with marble statues surrounding it. Carlos' last memories of Cuba are of sitting in this home and watching *Demetrius and the Gladiators*, *How to Marry a Millionaire*, and *Three Coins in a Fountain*.

Two months later, Carlos is interviewing with a prospective foster family in Miami. A nice Jewish couple hears of the plight of the orphaned children from Cuba and wants to take Carlos in. Another family, not far away, is willing to take Tony. The expectation at the time is that it will be only a few months longer before the parents arrive from Cuba. It would be years before Marie Antoinette comes.

As Carlos sits in the nice living room with these nice people, all that he lost suddenly sweeps over Carlos, and he starts crying. He realizes that he is not the same anymore. He is no longer the little boy in Cuba living with his parents without a care in the world, except for the antiques that terrorize him and the lizards that disgust him. He is not the boy with the Viking ship and the comic books.

Carlos ends up living with this nice family for 9 months. They keep him for as long as they can. His mother hasn't arrived, though. He learns English eventually and forges a life different from the one he had in Cuba, but still wonderful in its own way.

Chapter 36 Analysis

The theme is grieving. Finally, Carlos cries and cries, grieving about the life he has lost. Once he has cried, however, he thinks that there is a possibility that he can be happy without these things that he has lost. He finds love and happiness for a short time with his foster family. Eventually, he has to leave them, too, but in return, he gains independence, learns English, and enjoys other wonderful things.

The palatial house with the grand staircase and pool is symbolic of paradise soon to be lost. In fact, in his memory, the staircase in the house seems to be floating. Just as the staircase has attained mythical status, so too, has the childhood he had and the future he might have had.

Carlos falls from the Garden of Eden when he comes to America. The foster home in Florida replaces it with something less grand, but nice. Even this becomes lost to him, but he realizes that every life offers riches different from the last.



Chapter 37

Chapter 37 Summary

Cuba is full of pools. The most enigmatic of all pools is Carlos' Uncle Amado's. Uncle Amado is an architect. He built an outdoor pool under his house, but he never finished the job, and the pool is just a cement hole with no tiles, no smooth surfaces, and no water.

One day, Uncle Amado invites them to swim at his house, which sits on the beach. There are beautiful fishes, anemones, and urchins in the water. It is a wonderland below. Tony decides to swim out farther and farther, until he reaches the very edge of the shallow sea floor that surrounds Cuba. He claims later that he swam past sharks and barracuda, until all he saw was a deep, unfathomable abyss.

Tony does not adjust to the life of an exile well. He continues to make rash and unwise decisions for which he pays dearly. This quality in him never changes, allowing him to live to the fullest while barely hanging on to it.

Chapter 37 Analysis

Pools are symbolic in this book. They stand for the privileged life that belongs to Carlos. The shores of Cuba are studded with the pools of expensive clubs and posh homes, and Carlos and his friends could swim in any of them. The pool at the Aquarium of the Revolution, however, is filled with sharks, and his Uncle Amado's pool is empty and incomplete, representing misbegotten ideas and sour fate.

In Eire's mind, all the pools blend into one, with an image of his brother swimming into the abyss.



Chapter 38

Chapter 38 Summary

Yury Gagarin, the first human to orbit the world comes to Cuba to make an appearance. Carlos and his Grandfather Amado decide to go to the parade. Fidel will be welcoming Yury, and Grandfather Amado says he wants to see the bastard that took everything he had.

Carlos and his grandfather see Fidel. He is just a little speck. They can hear him through the loudspeakers, but what they see is just a little pinpoint. Carlos holds his grandfather's hand on their way back. It would be the last time he ever would.

Chapter 38 Analysis

The fact that Fidel is only an insignificant spot is metaphoric. Like any other human being, he is insignificant, and yet, it is this insignificant speck who has destroyed the lives of so many. That speck ultimately tears a grandson away from a grandfather.



Chapter 39

Chapter 39 Summary

It takes Carlos' mother three-and-a-half years before she reunites with them. She is, at one point, chased by a mob who consider her a traitor for wanting to leave. She does not give up, no matter how many obstacles get in her way. While his mother loves him intensely, Carlos has buried his love for his parents deep inside, where it cannot hurt him.

Carlos does remember the lizards, however, and it is his life-long challenge to conquer his revulsion for them. He cannot get past the superficial and see that underneath the disgusting and vile exterior, there is nothing truly disgusting or vile about a lizard.

Chapter 39 Analysis

The lizards are symbolic of the things that scare Eire. When he is living in exile, separated from his parents, he is afraid to remember his love for them, so he buries them far, far down, trying to kill their memory, the way he killed the lizards that he did not want to see.

Carlos realizes that this is wrong, however. Just as he must learn to love the lizard as one of God's creations, so too, must he learn to look at all the things that are vile or frightening to him. Included amongst these is the love of his parents.



Chapter 40

Chapter 40 Summary

Tony and Carlos leave their family behind the glass window and board the airplane to America at sunset. From the airplane, they see the Cuban countryside below for the first and last time. They see the island shaped like a lizard become smaller and smaller. It is very, very green with palm trees that look like cocktail toothpicks. They see the white clouds and the big, big sea. The sea is bigger than Carlos ever imagined it to be, and they see the setting sun. It is tangerine-colored. After that, there is no Havana, only sea below them. They start to think about being able to drink cola and chew gum again.

Chapter 40 Analysis

As Tony and Carlos leave their parents, they die inside. The plane takes them away from Cuba, and all that is left inside is a silent void. When they think of cola and bubble gum, however, the process of resurrection begins.



Characters

Carlos Eire

Carlos is the author, narrator, and main character of this book. By his own admission, as a child of a judge, he is spoiled and entitled, as are all his friends and classmates. Before the Revolution made many families disappear, he and his brother attend an elite private school run by the Christian Brothers. He spends his days tormenting captive animals (that belong to the private zoo of a neighbor), blowing up lizards, blowing up his own hand with firecrackers, refusing to eat dark food for fear that he will become black and unprivileged, fearing the different antique collectibles in the house, hating his adopted brother, and denying that someday he will lose everything he has.

Carlos is a product of his environment, and is always looking for mischief. This behavior, however, is more encouraged than discouraged by his father, the judge. Only when one of the antique items is damaged does his father seem to get angry. Carlos and his friends run around unsupervised for most of the day, except when there is a birthday party, and the children are gathered under the watchful eyes of the chaperoning mothers. It is this carefree boyhood that he misses most as an adult in America. Danger abounds for a boy in Cuba, but he is allowed to enjoy his life. He is allowed to throw rocks, chase pesticide jeeps, and eat hive-inducing fruits.

Even such a carefree boy feels the oppression of Fidel, however. Carlos sees people being shot at the wall on a daily basis, hears bombs falling in the night, is banned from watching his favorite movies, and cannot find the foods that he loves. Even after decades of living in America where he has become a successful university professor, his heart still yearns for Cuba, the Cuba of his childhood.

Louis XVI

Carlos refers to his father as Louis XVI throughout the whole book, which lends the book a sense of the absurd. By referring to his father as the late king of France, he successfully portrays him as an eccentric whose mind exists far from the realities of the world. In a way, this softens Carlos' criticism toward his father for not having protected them. Louis the XVI is a judge who is obsessed with collecting European art, things that he remembers from his past life. He also adopted Ernesto, a poor boy he brought home from the streets.

Nobody else can stand Ernesto, not even the adults, but Louis XVI does not see this. We eventually learn that Ernesto is a degenerate who constantly tries to molest Carlos and Tony. Neither boy reports this to his father for fear that he will not believe them. Ernesto's adoption becomes a point of dissension between Louis XVI and his wife, for she is never consulted about the decision, nor is she in agreement with it. Carlos does not understand his father's reasons for making this choice, in much the same way that



he does not understand the reasons for any of the choices his father makes. Louis XVI never leaves Cuba and dies of a heart attack surrounded by his collection and Ernesto. He never sees his sons again after they leave for America.

Marie Antoinette

Just as Carlos refers to his father as Louis XVI, he refers to his mother as Marie Antoinette. This is a little unfair since she never concedes to the fact that she was married to her husband when he was the French king. By referring to both his parents as beheaded royalty, Eire evokes the cyclical nature of history. Just as the king and queen of France were once at the top of the world but then executed, so too, were Carlos' parents at the top of the world and then ruined. His mother is a member of the elite society of Havana, but upon arriving in the United States, she is relegated to living in a basement apartment in Chicago.

By the time Marie Antoinette gets to the United States to take care of her sons, the sons are capable of taking care of themselves. In fact, it is she who needs to be taken care of in this foreign land where she does not speak the language or understand the culture. In addition, her bad leg makes her quite incapable of getting a job. Still, Carlos feels a respect towards his mother in a way that he does not toward his father. He shows this sentiment by taking on his mother's maiden name as his last name and keeping only the initial of his father's family name. It is Marie Antoinette who has the strength and foresight to bring him to America, after all.

Tony

Tony is Carlos' older brother. As children, his age makes him savvier than Carlos, thus giving him a perpetual edge in everything they do. Carlos loves him dearly and misses him when they are put in separate orphanages upon their arrival in the United States.

Ernesto

Ernesto is the dreaded adopted brother. Louis XVI recognizes him on the street as a son from his past life and brings him home. He is a degenerate, and he terrorizes Carlos and Tony with his attempts to molest them.

Cousin Fernando

Fernando is the hero of heroes, a young man fighting against Fidel. He is caught and thrown into jail where he spends the next 27 years. Eire sees him in America 31 years after his arrest.



Aunt Lucia

Aunt Lucia is Louis XVI's sister. She is the woman whom Carlos calls the woman without desires. She is the antithesis of the desires, sense of entitlement, and longing that Eire feels are part of his sinful heart.

Fidel Castro

Castro is the dictator who took everything from the Cuban populace, including Carlos and his family.

Eugenio

Eugenio is Carlos' childhood friend. He is the one who hangs on the longest to the pesticide jeep.

Uncle Amado

Uncle Amado is the brother of Louis XVI, but while he lives in Cuba, Carlos sees him only a handful of times. Once in America, however, it is Uncle Amado who rescues him and Tony from the orphanage. The two-and-a-half years that Carlos lives with him are the happiest of his life.



Objects/Places

Lizards

Lizards abound in Cuba, and Carlos hates them with a passion. It is an aversion he thinks he inherits from his grandmother. His prayer is that someday he can learn to love these creatures of God.

Sunset

The sunsets in Cuba are more intense than those in the United States, in Eire's eyes. They are a fiery tangerine/orange.

Cuba Clouds

Ever since Eire's departure from Cuba, he swears he sees clouds that are shaped like Cuba.

Firecrackers

Before the revolution, Louis XVI takes the boys to Chinatown to buy firecrackers. The boys are obsessive about firecrackers and all other explosives. One explodes in Carlos' hand.

Breadfruit

Shortly before Carlos' departure from Cuba, he and his friends get their hands on the breadfruit that has fallen from the neighbor's tree. They have a breadfruit war in the street for which they get in trouble.

Turquoise Water

The sea around Cuba is a radiant turquoise blue that merges with the tangerine sunsets.

Shark Pool

In the Aquarium of the Revolution, there is a kidney-shaped pool full of sharks. This image continues to haunt Carlos even after he has lived in the United States for many years.



Pesticide Jeep

The jeep sprayed blue pesticide on the streets, and the boys made a game of riding up to it on their bikes and try to hang onto it.

Bombs

Bombs are always going off in Cuba as anti-revolutionists rebel against Fidel.

Maria Theresa

Maria Theresa is the portrait of the Empress Maria Theresa of Austria that hangs in the room where they boys watch TV. She scares Carlos, and he often has nightmares about her.



Themes

Loss/Longing

The predominant theme is that of loss. Fidel forces Cubans to make a choice between exile and oppression. Carlos' mother chooses exile for herself and her sons. In being exiled, Carlos loses at the age of 11, not just his country but his whole life. He is separated from his parents, his grandparents, his friends, and a way of life. In America, his longing manifests itself in Cuba-shaped clouds and vivid, tactile memories. The loss has actually begun even before he leaves for America. Fidel has already taken away from the populace everything, ranging from free speech to tropical shakes. Eire recreates the events from his childhood, especially the dangerous moments that bring with them a sense of exhilaration. These are the memories that are most alive to him. His recollections are full of colors, tastes, sounds, and smells. There are moments when Eire imagines what his adult life might have been if Fidel had been vanquished. "I see myself staying at home in Havana, with no Revolution left to chase me away, free to apply Brylcreem to my hair and dance the night away at a thousand and one nightclubs. I see myself leading a better sweeter life than the one God has graced me with." Although these moments are followed with the acknowledgment that life is not that simple, the sense of longing, not only for the past but also for the future that might have been, pervades the book.

Forgiveness

Where there is anger, there is bound to be a struggle with forgiveness, and in this book, there is much of both. Obviously, Eire is livid with Fidel. This anger goes beyond forgiveness in the scope of the book. He is also angry at Ernesto for having violated him and Tony the way he did. Carlos does not make much of an attempt to forgive him, either. However, there is a more complex anger that he feels towards his father. Eire is angry at his father for his lack of action, for the lack of willingness he shows to protect his family. Despite the fact that his father knows from the beginning that Castro's Cuba will be no good, he does not make any attempt to save his family when there is still time. In fact, even when his wife and children escape to America, he makes no attempt to come with them and take care of them in a foreign land. He lets them go to fend for themselves while he stays with all his cherished art pieces and Ernesto. Ernesto is another bone of contention. Eire's father adopts Ernesto without consulting the family, thus allowing his boys to be in harm's way every day. He chooses to be blind to Ernesto's evil. There is so little trust that Louis XVI will protect his own sons, neither Carlos nor Tony considers telling him the truth about Ernesto. They fear that he will not believe them. Even behind the wonderful memories of car-surfing, rock fighting, and firecracker lighting, there is the father who sanctioned these dangerous activities. "Louis XVI must have been one of the least safety-conscious men in Cuba. Or the world, I think." But Eire does not want to be angry with his father whom he never saw after he left Cuba. He has fond memories of him as well. The theme of forgiveness centers



around forgiving his father, as well as being forgiven by him. In his dreams, Louis XVI visits him and tells him that he forgives him for all the bad thoughts Carlos has of him.

Denial

According to Carlos, denial is his survival mechanism of choice. While the world is changing around him, his classmates are disappearing from the country one by one, bombs are falling around him, and supplies are being rationed, he believes that he can stay unchanged. Sooner or later, he says, "denial can deny even itself." One day, after he arrives in Florida, as he's being interviewed by a family that is considering taking him in until his mother arrives, he starts sobbing and cannot stop. He misses his parents, his grandparents, his comic books, and the Cuban sun. He misses everything and everybody, and he cannot stop crying. This is the first time he realizes the limited power of denial. Many years later, the act of writing the book is in and of itself his attempt at moving past denial. By returning to the memories that are bittersweet or purely bitter, by remembering the people who are gone from his life, by thinking about all that he has lost, he can no longer live in denial. The last chapter is about the day that he left Cuba. He roller skates around his neighborhood and says goodbye to everything. At the airport, he says goodbye to his family, not knowing for sure when, if ever, he will see them again. As the plane takes off, he says goodbye to Cuba, and yet, the book is proof that saying goodbye does not mean losing what you love. With the end of denial comes the beginning of acceptance.



Style

Point of View

This book is a memoir, so naturally it is told from the point of view of the author. However, even within this, the point of view shifts. Sometimes he speaks from the perspective of the juvenile Carlos and sometimes he speaks as the adult looking back. Narrating from the child's perspective is effective for evoking what he actually felt, saw, and heard. It allows the reader to experience an event as he experienced it. However, when Eire wants to communicate an understanding he gained retrospectively, he must revert to speaking from an adult's perspective. Both points of view are necessary to understand fully the profound effect of the Cuban Revolution on the life of a child living there at the time. To speak of the unspeakable loss, the child's perspective allows the reader to see what it is he had. From the child's point of view, Eire talks about the breadfruit war, the little girl with straight brown-hair, the movies with Kirk Douglas, and the fear he felt for the Eye Jesus. From the adult's point-of-view, he sees the meaning behind the bombs, the shooting at the wall, and the confiscating of property. After living in exile for 37 years, he knows that the situation is not temporary and that it is already too late for him to enjoy the nightlife as a young, privileged man in Havana. He knows what it feels like to have the world, lose everything, gain other things, but never stop longing for the things that he lost.

Setting

The book opens on New Year's Day of Carlos Eire's eighth year. Batista has fled, and Fidel Castro has just come to power. Carlos Eire, the author and narrator of this book is a child growing up among the Cuban elite. Consequently, the stage is set to show the lifestyle of the privileged. Although the poor are mentioned, they are mentioned only as a contrast to the lives of the wealthy. Eire describes the palatial houses with pools, private menageries, chauffeurs, and movie parties. He remembers a birthday party for the son of a sugar-cane plantation owner. The estate where this party is thrown not only has a huge swimming pool, it also has tennis courts, a stable full of horses, a golf course, a garage full of luxury cars, and a long, winding driveway that leads from the gate at the road to the mansion. The party favors that are passed out are more elaborate than the gifts brought for the birthday boy. This is the kind of luxury that surrounds the children before Castro. After Castro, the mansions are abandoned one by one, bombs are dropped, supplies are rationed, and schools are shut down. After he is exiled to the United States, Carlos' world is very different. The book does not dwell on it, for its focus is life in Cuba. However, it mentions the roach-infested apartments, minimum-wage jobs, and the racism, mostly for the sake of contrast.



Language and Meaning

Despite the fact that Carlos Eire is a professor of History and Religious Studies at Yale, the language used in this book is very casual and colloquial. Descriptions in this book are florid and dramatic, true to the Cuban tradition. The tone, despite the grim subject, is humorous. For example, the opening sentence of the book is, "The world changed while I slept, and much to my surprise, no one had consulted me." There is much tongue and cheek, and in just the same way that he makes gentle fun of his child self in this line, he jokes about the idiosyncrasies of those around him. The first characters after himself to be introduced in this story are his parents. He says, "My father, who vividly remembered his prior incarnation as King Louis XVI of France, probably dreamt of costume balls, mobs, and guillotines. My mother, who had no memory of having been Marie Antoinette, couldn't have shared his dreams." He is slightly blasphemous at times, too, and occasionally uses Spanish profanities. Other Spanish words and phrases are incorporated, with the English translation immediately following. When he refers to Castro, he does not restrain his disdain. About the one time he saw him speak, he writes, "Even if you plugged up your ears with your fingers, the sound of his voice was loud enough to find its way to your brain."

Structure

The book is 383 pages and 40 chapters long. Each chapter is approximately 6 to 8 pages long. The first chapter begins with the day Fidel overthrows Batista. The last chapter is about the day Carlos leaves Cuba. Between these chapters, it is mostly chronological, but not completely so. There are many flashbacks and skipping around, as our mind is apt to do. One memory often leads to another. For example, a memory about urinating in the classroom because a strict teacher wouldn't allow anyone to go to the bathroom leads to a memory about clouds, which leads to memories of getting glasses for the first time. On occasion, it flashes forward. Chapter 21, for example is about his life in Chicago, three-and-a-half years after he landed in America. Chapter 36 takes Carlos from the last movie party in Cuba to the first meeting with his foster parents in Florida. Between Chapter 28 and Chapter 29, there is a Chapter named *##! %\$+!. In this chapter he finally reveals the reason for his hatred towards Ernesto. It is explained that some chapters in life just can't be numbered.



Quotes

"The world changed while I slept, and much to my surprise, no one had consulted me."
Chapter 1, pg.1

"I knew that some of the kids at my school were very wealthy. I knew this because even in my own neighborhood, our house was relatively small. Crammed with valuables, but still small." Chapter 9 pg.74

"When I die, I would like to be buried at a Christmas tree farm." Chapter 10, pg.85

"You see, Spanish culture is built upon one warning: beware, all is illusion." Chapter 10, pg. 87

"I was one of the lucky ones. Fidel couldn't obliterate me as he did all other children, slicing off their heads ever so slowly, and replacing them with fearful, slavish copies of his own. New heads held in place by tow bolts, like Boris Karloff's in *Frankenstein*, one bolt forged from fear, the other from illusion." Chapter 10, pg. 87

"What was going on in his head? The head he had supposedly once list to the guillotine? Why didn't he pack up his whole damn art collection, find the first ship out of Cuba, and take us to the United States?" Chapter 23, pg. 220

"How I envy Kirk. Odin heard him, in Valhalla, and Kirk was saved from himself. Rescued from burning passion. No such luck for me." Chapter 23, pg. 223

"At the same time that he was sweeping the beggars off the streets, Fidel was silencing all opponents with an iron fist." Chapter 24 pg. 235

"Looking down from heaven, Saint Anne saw the lights. All the lights. And she heard the music. All the music. She saw, as one can do only in heaven, how the lights and the music were all of one piece, connected y love and zest for life itself." Chapter 24 pg. 239

"And maybe, as you stand in line, you will catch a whiff of Cuban cigar smoke, wafting at you from a faraway island where mamey plants are ever in bloom; a lizard-shaped isle where no one gets to choose freely and the only idiocy allowed is that which his sanctioned by Fidel." Chapter 25 pg. 248

"We said okay and got into the Plymouth. We knew there wouldn't be a next time. And I guess he did too." Chapter 34 pg. 334

"I stared out the window, transfixed, as Cuba became smaller and smaller beneath us." Chapter 40 pg. 382



Topics for Discussion

- 1) Why do you think the author waited so long after leaving Cuba before he wrote this book?
- 2) What didn't Louis XVI take his family out of Cuba?
- 3) Do you think Marie Antoinette should have come to America?
- 4) The word "Confession" is in the title of the book. Do you find this book to be a confessional?
- 5) Do you think Louis XVI should have come to America?
- 6) Why do you think Tony did not adapt to America as well as Carlos seemed to have?
- 7) Did Carlos adapt to America?
- 8) Do you think that Eire was truly able to forgive his father?