



In the Embrace of the Alligator

Amanda Hale

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The woman is flying in a small airplane and sees in the distance the great cumbrous mass of El Yunque, the flat-topped mesa that announces the historic town of Baracoa. She has likely heard the legend of the Honey River, where it is said that the person who bathes in its waters and gets married in Baracoa must stay there forever. She knows people in Baracoa. She is going to meet Onaldo, her Afro-Cuban lover, and she will become 'Katrina' to continue her private journals. In this series of linked fictions, unified by place and a cast of overlapping characters, Katrina travels the length of El Caimán, the alligator which is Cuba. The narratives that make up this book have their origins in Hale's travel journal, but emerge as stories, arriving at that place just beyond creative non-fiction. Vivid and sensitive portraits are balanced with the dark undercurrents of Cuban life. Katrina witnesses how politics have re-shaped the culture and lives of the people she encounters, while she falls deeply in love with the true and hidden life of El Caimán. "This is one of the best collections of stories I have read. As a Cuban myself, reading *In the Embrace of the Alligator* has been like looking at myself in a mirror. It made me laugh, it also brought tears to my eyes, and sometimes it made me feel angry and ashamed. I am amazed by Amanda Hale's grasp of Cuba's reality, and by her remarkable insight into our culture." — Tomás Aquilino Lopez, writer and art curator. "Written with warmth, compassion and understanding, *In the Embrace of the Alligator* is one of those rare glimpses into the real Cuba, its people, and its stories." — Eva Stachniak, author of *Garden of Venus* and *Necessary Lies*.

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