

Adiós to My Parents: A Memoir

Héctor Aguilar Camín

Chandler Thompson, Translator

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Héctor Aguilar Camín's compelling memoir *Adiós to My Parents* recalls the romance, marriage, and eventual separation of his mother and father, from their first flirtation to their deaths following decades of estrangement. Beautifully written yet often unsparing in detail, the memoir is set amid Latin American politics and involves flawed families, curious characters, good fortune, and the longer, darker shadow of bad luck.

Aguilar Camín's mother, Emma, came to Chetumal, Mexico, from Cuba, stepping with her family onto the docks of an initially "disheartening" river town. Emma and her sister were young and lovely, attracting men's attention in their fluttery chiffon skirts and hats bedecked with ribbons. Emma's 1940s wedding to Héctor Aguilar, the handsome son of a local businessman, began with promise and passion, but by 1959 the couple had parted ways; Héctor left their home in disgrace.

Aguilar Camín creates multifaceted portraits of his parents along with the arc of their marriage, from the earlier vibrant years when "the future was theirs for the taking on a tray of promises" to his father's failed enterprises and alcoholic tendencies. His mother, once regarded as the stylish Cuban whose dresses were the talk of Chetumal, found herself taking in boarders and working as a seamstress to support her children. She stitched bridal gowns late into the night with her sister Luisa, sipping strong coffee to stay focused while reminiscing about better times.

Beyond the marriage of Héctor and Emma, *Adiós to My Parents* is fascinating in its considerations of history, political circumstance, devastating hurricanes, and even the powerful magic of a rapacious witch. Aguilar Camín relates his own perspective from childhood through his adult years, summoning eloquent compassion and humor as his parents struggle with age, illness, mortality—and the perplexing detours of their lives.

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