



Thoughts without Cigarettes: A Memoir

Oscar Hijuelos

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A beloved Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist turns his pen to the real people and places that have influenced his life and literature. A comprehensive look into the mind of a writer.

Born in Manhattan's Morningside Heights to Cuban immigrants in 1951, Oscar Hijuelos introduces readers to the colorful circumstances of his upbringing. The son of a Cuban hotel worker and exuberant poetry-writing mother, his story, played out against the backdrop of a working-class neighborhood, takes on an even richer dimension when his relationship with his family and culture changes forever. During a sojourn with his mother in pre-Castro Cuba, he catches a disease that sends him into a Dickensian home for terminally ill children. The yearlong stay estranges him from the very language and people he had so loved.

With a cast of characters whose stories are both funny and tragic, *Thoughts Without Cigarettes* follows Hijuelos's subsequent quest for his true identity — a mystery whose resolution he eventually discovers hidden away in the trappings of his fiction, and which finds its most glorious expression in his best-known book, *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*. Illuminating the most dazzling scenes from his novels, *Thoughts Without Cigarettes* reveals the true stories and indelible memories that shaped a literary genius.

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