



Romay, Alexis.
Salidas de emergencia.
(Emergency Exits)

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In the epilog, Romay writes that he sees this book as an attempt to explain his ruined country, Cuba, to his “adorable” Jewish American wife, whom he met in 1999 at a Scottish writers’ retreat that had given him “poetic asylum.” The result is eye-opening for everyone. Not only is Romay’s writing agile, fresh, intelligent, and sprinkled with Cuba’s popular sayings and vernacular humor, but it offers a clear view of a world that is mostly inaccessible—reading this book is like taking a trip to an exotic land, unknown to the rest of the world. So far, the Cuban experience has been almost nontransferable, perhaps because literary renderings end up sounding too emotional and too strident. In addition, the Cuba of the Nineties used here as the setting is unknown to those who left much earlier (particularly those who still now proudly wear their Che Guevara T-shirts). The main characters are high school art teacher David Martín; the two women in his life, Cecilia, and Ileana; and his father, Enrique (Pipo), an architect who nostalgically returns to Cuba after being married for 13 years to Spanish designer Pepa. Another character, also a teacher and a pederast, offers explicit accounts of those involved in a child pornography tape, including the Dominican tourist who tries and fails to take it out of the country. The title refers to the imaginative ways each character exits or occasionally rationalizes his or her untenable situation, and underlying the entire narrative is the nostalgia of every exile—a universal feeling despite the book’s distinctive setting. Highly recommended.—*Dolores Koch, New York City*

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