



The Cruel Country

Judith Ortiz Cofer

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“I am learning the alchemy of grief—how it must be carefully measured and doled out, inflicted—but I have not yet mastered this art,” writes Judith Ortiz Cofer in *The Cruel Country*. This richly textured, deeply moving, lyrical memoir centers on Cofer’s return to her native Puerto Rico after her mother has been diagnosed with late-stage lung cancer.

Cofer’s work has always drawn strength from her life’s contradictions and dualities, such as the necessities and demands of both English and Spanish, her travels between and within various mainland and island subcultures, and the challenges of being a Latina living in the U.S. South. Interlaced with these far-from-common tensions are dualities we all share: our lives as both sacred and profane, our negotiation of both child and adult roles, our desires to be the person who belongs and also the person who is different.

What we discover in *The Cruel Country* is how much Cofer has heretofore held back in her vivid and compelling writing. This journey to her mother’s deathbed has released her to tell the truth within the truth. She arrives at her mother’s bedside as a daughter overcome by grief, but she navigates this cruel country as a writer—an acute observer of detail, a relentless and insistent questioner.

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