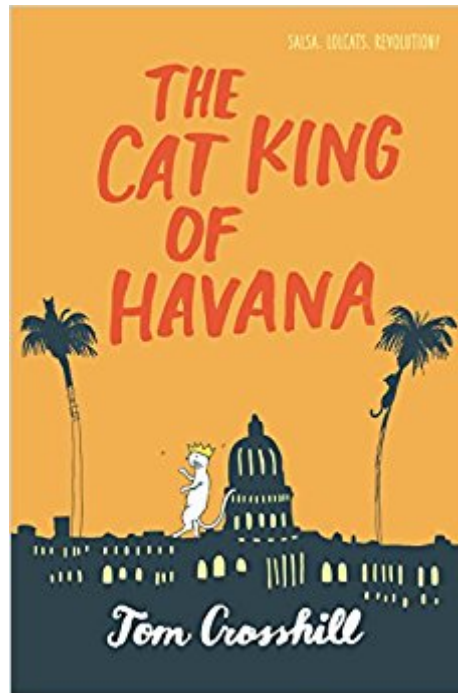




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The Cat King Of Havana



Synopsis

Lolcats. Salsa dancing. Unrequited love. Tom Crosshill's smart and witty debut teen novel treads a colorful coming-of-age journey from New York City to Havana that will appeal to fans of books by Matthew Quick and Junot Díaz. When Rick Gutiérrez—known as "That Cat Guy" at school—gets dumped on his sixteenth birthday for uploading cat videos from his bedroom instead of experiencing the real world, he realizes it's time for a change. So Rick joins a salsa class . . . because of a girl, of course. Ana Cabrera is smart, friendly, and smooth on the dance floor. He might be half Cuban, but Rick dances like a drunk hippo. Desperate to impress Ana, he invites her to spend the summer in Havana. The official reason: learning to dance. The hidden agenda: romance under the palm trees. Except Cuba isn't all sun, salsa, and music. As Rick and Ana meet his family and investigate the reason why his mother left Cuba decades ago, they learn that politics isn't just something that happens to other people. And when they find romance, it's got sharp edges.

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Customer Reviews

Breaking the fourth wall, Rick speaks directly and engagingly to readers, infusing Crosshill's first YA novel with wry, self-effacing humor....Crosshill's big-hearted novel shines. (Publishers Weekly) "Crosshill shows the difficulties and dangers of life behind the bloqueo, as well as the vibrant culture within the country. The book begins as a standard romance, then grows to include much more. All hail the Cat King, a strong new voice in contemporary storytelling." (Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)) Crosshill's debut novel manages to make a book full of weighty subjects into a seemingly light read. The result is a

funny, sometimes sad portrait of a teenager trying to connect with his roots and realizing that the world is more complicated than he ever wanted to know. (Booklist Online)

I picked up *The Cat King of Havana* for one simple and perhaps shallow reason: I'm going to Cuba in November. And I know basically nothing about the island, the culture, the history, and only bits and pieces about the political situation. What better way to get a taste of all of that than through fiction? Well, *The Cat King of Havana*, while for the rest not being a typically me story, did deliver on that. *The Cat King of Havana* is about Rick, a Cuban American webmaster of a cat video site who may be considered... a geek. He doesn't get out much, but he doesn't mind, because he likes his realm of internet life... until he gets dumped. In an effort to get out there, he takes up salsa dancing and quickly falls for Ana, an experienced dancer. And together, they travel to Havana for a summer of learning the purest form of Cuban salsa, a trip that ends up being so much more. I should be upfront, because nothing ruins a book like having the wrong expectations. This is not a love story. Rick is obviously crushing hard on Ana in a kind of desperate and idyllic way. He ascribes qualities to her and potential to their relationship that aren't always entirely fair. Ana's pretty clear from the beginning though: she doesn't feel that way about him. That may sound like Rick is too pushy, but it honestly didn't read that way. This is just a classic and realistic tale of unrequited love - in the way that a lot of us probably experienced in high school. Rick discovers so much about himself over the course of this book that eventually he grows out of it too. I came into this book for Cuba, and I definitely feel like that part of the story was strong. You can tell that Crosshill is intimately familiar with the island and its culture. It really felt like an insider perspective, and I felt like I learned SO MUCH. The poverty, the limitations, the heartbreaking push to frame the whole of the country to the lens and wishes of tourists (which is degrading like hell), the contrast between the old and younger generations, the effect of new media and the internet on exposing the political situation - despite the risks that inherently carries... I'm impressed. Though I didn't care overly much for the characters, being introduced to this rich setting alone already kept me reading. The thing about the characters is... I don't know. It's hard to really like them when there's such a focus on a romance that is so hopeless. Rick is kind of cute in the way that he cares so much, but he borders on annoying at certain points. Ana is an admirable free spirit, but kind of distant and idealized from Rick's perspective. Rick's family is... okay. Though I feel so conflicted about his annoying cousin. But I can get behind that group of characters when push comes to shove and they stand up in whatever way they can to the injustice they find in Cuba. It was a little nerve-wracking, but their hearts were 100% in the right place. At the end of the day, though nothing in the book truly grabbed me as being

fantastic, it has a lot of great messages: standing up for what's right, respecting foreign cultures, growing into your own person and letting go of childish fantasies, treasuring friendship above love, hard work paying off and being enough to make a distant dream into a reality... This story wasn't what I expected, but I don't regret reading it for a second.

Summing Up: With a vibrant and illuminating backdrop of Cuba, *The Cat King of Havana* was a really interesting read. Interesting is absolutely the best word for it, because it really made me think and taught me quite a bit about a culture I know so little about. I loved seeing the culture and getting glimpses of the salsa scene (must see (and do) on my trip), and ultimately, the way the characters grew in the story was quite admirable. They didn't fully capture my heart, but their adventure was compelling.

Recommended To: Readers with wanderlust who don't mind having no romance.*An electronic review copy was provided by the publisher in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the contents of the review.

The Cat King of Havana is full of fun, dance, culture, and love. I love the characters, and the settings of New York and Cuba just added so much to the story. Rick is one of the coolest, geekiest teens I've ever had the pleasure of reading about. His love for cat videos is just the icing on the cake. He starts out with the plan of getting the girl, but he learns so much more about his mother's history and the politics that shapes the lives of the people that he hardly knows anything about. Trying to keep his deceased mother's memory alive, Rick now runs one of the most successful cat video websites around. He's content with his introverted ways and doesn't think about anything else. Once his girlfriend dumps him because he is always in front of his computer, he thinks that maybe he does need to get out more. Of course, this comes after he mopes around the house and his dad suggests that he find something else to do with his time. He takes a gig with a local band, playing for a dance group. There, he sees Ana for the first time. What does he decide to do? Take dance lessons to get close enough to talk to Ana. When he tells his dad about his dancing, he also says he wants to know more about his Cuban mother's history. And so the story takes off as Ana and Rick dance away; all the way to Cuba. Grief comes in many forms, so I can't judge Rick's dad for his distant behavior. I'm sure the loss of his wife was heartbreaking. Rick tries to remember her by looking at cat videos; something his mother loved before she died. They coped in their own ways, and I can respect that. The salsa dancing is something I haven't come across in YA books (maybe I need to up my game), but it was a nice touch. I love the rhythm of the story as the characters danced to the music. The

Spanish slang throughout made the dancing and music much more real, so it was easy to picture these characters going through the motions. The Havana setting was so needed here. It wasn't just about a half-Cuban teen trying to impress a girl. It was about the history of Cuba and its culture. I think the author did an amazing job of exploring this side of Rick's family. I love even more how it ended, despite what transpired this tale in the first place. Overall, an enjoyable read filled with laughs, dancing, music and culture. I definitely recommend this one to fans who want something different in their young adult contemporary reading. The love, family, and friendships in this book are very well done and I can't wait to read more from this author.*I received an advance copy of this book, from the publisher for free, in exchange for an honest review. All opinions are my own.*

I read this quirky, hilarious, moving and perceptive book on an ARC tour, and now I am buying a copy to keep and to share. I want to delve again and again into its pages, to re-read my favorite scenes. Some of them made me laugh so hard, I had to read them aloud to my amused (and probably annoyed) family. Others were chilling. Still others made me stop and think deeply. Protagonist Rick Gutierrez is a hero with such a wry view of the world and of himself, the reader can't help rooting for him as he gets knocked down by challenges big and small. His mother died not too long ago, and his skills at maintaining a popular cat video website aren't enough to earn him respect at school or success in romance. He stumbles into dance via an unrequited crush on a young woman who's an accomplished salsa dancer. Somehow the two of them end up traveling to Havana together, to find out the truth about Rick's mother's family in Cuba--and why she left for the US, alone, many years ago. What they discover down there will test not only their courage and compassion, but their dancing mojo and their friendship. They will explore the gap between sugarcoated fantasy and bitter reality that can be deep enough to swallow up a relationship...or even an entire country. The author is clearly a dancer himself, as the entire book is permeated by the rhythms and vibrancy of Salsa in all its expressive forms. But you don't have to be a dancer to appreciate it; the spirit of it lifts you up and teaches you something truly special by the end. This is an unusual, smart, satisfying wonder of a book--I can't recommend it highly enough!

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