In 1962, at the age of eleven, Carlos Eire was one of 14,000 children airlifted out of Cuba, his parents left behind. His life until then is the subject of Waiting for Snow in Havana, a wry, heartbreaking, intoxicatingly beautiful memoir of growing up in a privileged Havana household -- and of being exiled from his own childhood by the Cuban revolution. That childhood, until his world changes, is as joyous and troubled as any other -- but with exotic differences. Lizards roam the house and grounds. Fights aren't waged with snowballs but with breadfruit. The rich are outlandishly rich, like the eight-year-old son of a sugar baron who has a real miniature race car, or the neighbor with a private animal garden, complete with tiger. All this is bathed in sunlight and shades of turquoise and tangerine: the island of Cuba, says one of the stern monks at Carlos's school, might have been the original Paradise -- and it is tempting to believe. His father is a municipal judge and an obsessive collector of art and antiques, convinced that in a past life he was Louis XVI and that his wife was Marie Antoinette. His mother looks to the future; conceived on a transatlantic liner bound for Cuba from Spain, she wants her children to be modern, which means embracing all things American. His older brother electrocutes lizards. Surrounded by eccentrics, in a home crammed with portraits of Jesus that speak to him in dreams and nightmares, Carlos searches for secret proofs of the existence of God. Then, in January 1959, President Batista is suddenly gone, a cigar-smoking guerrilla named Castro has taken his place, and Christmas is canceled. The echo of firing squads is everywhere. At the Aquarium of the Revolution, sharks multiply in a swimming pool. And one by one, the authors schoolmates begin to disappear -- spirited away to the United States. Carlos will end up there himself, alone, never to see his father again. Narrated with the urgency of a confession, Waiting for Snow in Havana is both an exorcism and an ode to a paradise lost. More than that, it captures the terrible beauty of those times in our lives when we are certain we have died -- and then are somehow, miraculously, reborn.
My Personal Review:
This book may very well be the most moving book that I will end up reading this year. Some of that no doubt has to do with learning a bit about my own Cuban heritage (mi abuela es de Cuba), but it also has to do with reading an author of uncommon grace and depth, who lacks neither humor nor bitterness in remembering and longing for his abruptly ended childhood. You cant help but to get misty eyed in the midst of your laughter; Eire lets the reader feel in ways that most authors can, at their best, only dream of.

It is rare that an author can combine multiple streams of thought into a [raging] river that contains both depth and complexity, but Eire appears to be one such author, combining history, memoir, theology and philosophy into a thick narrative about his childhood exile from Cuba. He is endowed with a tremendous sense of the poetic; he writes sensuously of Cuban nights before the Revolution, the perplexities of childhood (some experience really are universal) and the uneasiness of Cuba after Castro seized power.

Eire is not without bitterness, either, as he reflects upon his exile and the difficulties it caused his family. He never saw his father again after he left Cuba, but his father also chose to not come over to the US with his mother; the mockery and sarcasm that Eire directs towards his father is understandable given the relational distance that his father placed within the relationship.

The real highlight of the book, however, is Eires ability to evoke emotion from the reader as he recalls his childhood. Reading his memories of Roman Catholic masses and schools is absolutely side splitting; the mixture of memory and imagination is written in a stream-of-consciousness style that brings to light the subjective reality of various events. In reading of the (privileged) state of Eires life before Castro, the anger that he feels due to Castro makes that much more sense.

This is a book well worth reading. The voice of exile that is Eires is a beautiful one that runs deeper than the surface: it has its scars and memories, its hopes and prayers. I highly recommend it.

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price:
Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy by Carlos Eire - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!