



The Revolution of Every Day

Cari Luna

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In the midnineties, New York's Lower East Side contained a city within its shadows: a community of squatters who staked their claims on abandoned tenements and lived and worked within their own parameters, accountable to no one but each other. On May 30, 1995, the NYPD rolled an armored tank down East Thirteenth Street and hundreds of police officers in riot gear mobilized to evict a few dozen squatters from two buildings. With gritty prose and vivid descriptions, Cari Luna's debut novel, *The Revolution of Every Day*, imagines the lives of five squatters from that time. But almost more threatening than the city lawyers and the private developers trying to evict them are the rifts within their community. Amelia, taken in by Gerrit as a teen runaway seven years earlier, is now pregnant by his best friend, Steve. Anne, married to Steve, is questioning her commitment to the squatter lifestyle. Cat, a fading legend of the downtown scene and unwitting leader of one of the squats, succumbs to heroin. The misunderstandings and assumptions, the secrets and the dissolution of the hope that originally bound these five threaten to destroy their homes as surely as the city's battering rams. Amid this chaos, Amelia struggles with her ambivalence about becoming a mother while knowing that her pregnancy has given her fellow squatters a renewed purpose to their fight—securing the squats for the next generation. Told from multiple points of view, *The Revolution of Every Day* shows readers a life that few people, including the New Yorkers who passed the squats every day, know about or understand.

The Revolution of Every Day Details

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From Reader Review *The Revolution of Every Day* for online ebook

Purlewe says

This is one of those books I could not put down. The characters were very real to me and I was sad when the book ended. I wish every book I picked up was as good as this. I am highly recommending this to my friends near and far!

Natalie Serber says

One of the pleasures of reading is being lifted from your life and dropped into a new and bold world. Portland writer Cari Luna's debut novel, *"The Revolution of Every Day,"* an elegy to a disappeared New York, does not disappoint. During the late 1980s and early '90s, when crack was king, families fled Lower East Side neighborhoods for the safety of the suburbs, leaving behind dangerous streets and dilapidated buildings. Luna's novel tells the story of a colony of squatters, people priced out of the rental market, who stake claims on abandoned tenements in lower Manhattan.

These urban pioneers drive out the crackheads and set about to convert Thirteen House and Cat House into safe and respectable homes. They forage the city for building materials and make repairs themselves. They dumpster-dive for food and cook large community meals. They run a bike shop from a storefront and teach neighborhood kids bicycle repair. In short, the squatters create a community. Yet all the while the wolf lurks — Mayor Rudy Giuliani and the City of New York want to reclaim the real estate. Eviction notices, courtroom drama, threats to the squatters' safety and a showdown with barricades and tear gas all occur in the name of gentrification and it makes for terrific reading.

Along with these huge outside pressures, there are threats from within the community that include betrayal, lust, drug abuse, infertility, and violence. Yes, Luna uses a full arsenal of troubles to provide narrative thrust, to keep us turning the pages to discover not so much what happens, for history tells us that the City of New York wins, but how things go down. She also keeps readers interested by making us care about her ensemble of gritty characters:

Amelia, a teen runaway who appeared in the squat seven years earlier, was taken in by Gerrit, one of the leaders, and nursed through heroin withdrawal. Steve and Anne, a tender and childless couple who struggle with Steve's philandering and Anne's commitment to the community, live downstairs. Cat, a downtown legend who garnered fame for merely knowing famous people, is now the reluctant leader of Cat House. Her history and bad habits continue to dog her.

The pedestrian drama of Amelia's pregnancy, the question of paternity, which takes up too large a portion of the narrative, isn't nearly as interesting and fresh as the struggle between the squatters and the city.

Additionally, the women in this novel allow their lives to be defined by outside influences, men and heroin. Amelia ultimately strikes out on her own but only because she's rejected by the man she thinks she loves. Cat stumbles back into her bad habits. Inertia and resignation relegate Anne to doormat status. Yes, all these action are plausible, but I yearned for one of the women to succeed on her own terms.

In a novel about place and home and community, it makes sense that New York City would be a character that looms large. The skyline as seen from the Brooklyn Bridge is described as "the fanged, glorious mouth of God." Anne, thinking of Steve and the early days of her marriage says "his chest was as broad and as deep as the city's skyline." While these descriptions lean toward sentimental, there are plenty of lovely and clear-eyed passages. The book's most beautiful moments come when Luna describes the city she once called home.

Walking over crack vials on the sidewalks is described as "crunchy like cutting a fresh path through old

snow." Of the city in the rain she writes, "The cars glide along, their taillights stretched out behind them, staining the streets red. They are anonymous and remote, unconcerned animals." Her words are especially powerful and lovely when she eulogizes the once vibrant street life of lower Manhattan:

"No more slow-smile leatherboys with unironic tattoos. No more bearded communist daddies with soft bellies and hard eyes. Good-bye to the forgotten guitar-genius with thin-armed jangling walk and his rock'n'roll banter in his claustrophobic top-floor studio. Good-bye to the aging actor with his whispered Buddhist chants, perched on a stool day after day in the caged basement vestibule of his subterranean St. Mark's castle. Good-bye to the miraculously middle aged junkie with her sweet nodding head and her needled arms. Money's pushing into the lower east side. All consuming consumer-class. Into the river, freaks and artists."

Luna exposes us, with tenderness and eyes open wide, to the strange and vivid beauty of a time and place we may otherwise turn from. She provides us with a satisfying opportunity to explore a foreign world.

Rachael Herron says

I had the good fortune to read this prior to release, and I can say unequivocally it can and will (and should!) change the world. More than just being lyrically and beautifully written (which it is -- every line of it), it has a story that sweeps the reader along, equal parts raw need, subsumed desire, and fervent, gorgeous optimism.

It's one of only two books in my life that I literally *heard* as I read, the thrumming of New York beating in my ears as I turned the pages. Luna's command of language is masterful, and her knowledge of the human heart (and its innate failings) even more so.

Lisa V says

Categorizing this novel as "historical fiction" seems to limit its scope. Luna has created compelling characters whose back stories are fascinating, and her writing is superb. Descriptions of the squats are incredibly vivid, as are her details about major and minor building repair -- it's clear that thoughtful and careful research went into every sentence, every page, every person. An excellent choice for a book group. Read it, share it, discuss it. Highly recommend.

Suzy says

Recommended by friend, Tevilla, at first I wasn't sure about this book, but I was quickly drawn into the stories of the people who "squatted" at Thirteen House and Cat House in NYC's Lower East Side in the late 80's and early 90's. This is a beautifully written first novel that I did not want to end. As one reviewer said, you can see, feel, taste and smell their stories. The title puzzled me a little, but I learned that for these people every day was a revolution. Every day they were fighting for their rights to housing, to keep the tenement building they had lived in over 10 years, that they had brought up to code and that they believed were theirs due to the law of possession. And, they were fighting to live every day a little better than the last.

I hated to say goodbye to these people at the end of the book. This will stay on my mind a long time - lots to think about!

Highly recommended.

Orlivan says

I read an advanced copy of this book and was struck by the lucid, incantatory beauty of Luna's prose and the psychological heft of her characters. Luna is a true empath. Even as she delineates her characters' foibles and failings you can feel her compassion for the basic human predicament. We yearn to see all of her people rise above their circumstances even as we quietly acknowledge that they, like us, may not. Part of what imbues the Revolution of Every Day with such life is the author's ability to evoke the throbbing energy and broken down splendor of 1990s New York. The book will make readers familiar with pre-boom Manhattan yearn for the simpler, grungier years when downtown was still home to derelicts and discontents and artists of all stripes.

Rachel Pollock says

This book tore my heart back to the framing. I will have to reread this novel a couple more times before i can really talk about how beautifully, tragically important i think it is.

Read it, just read it.

One caveat: if you can manage NOT to read the blurb synopsis on here, or Amazon, or anywhere, don't. They've got what i feel is a pretty gut-kicking spoiler right out there in the synop of an event that doesn't even come into the plot until the last 80 pages of the book, which pissed me right off, since it's kind of presented in the synop as more of an inciting event than a part of the barreling toward climax/confrontation.

Peter Landau says

At first I thought: "Peyton Place" in a squat on the Lower East Side, then maybe THE SUN ALSO RISES transplanted from Paris in the 1920s to punks in 1990s New York City, but since I neither watched the former nor read the latter, guess I'll just have to take THE REVOLUTION OF EVERY DAY for itself. Besides the setting, more political than junkie homestead, the story is conventional in that it's about people and love and longing and the connections they do or do not make, you know, life. But this life takes place below the radar of what passes for life in New York City, which is the majority of life in New York City, life that is bulldozed and built over to support the false life of New York City, because fantasy is more profitable. Still, I thought the straightforward narrative, the melodrama plot, the characters with backstories, all the worn tools of fiction would alienate me. Somehow, I was better than that. But the product of a good story well told is that it draws me in, I became just as invested in the story and its people as the characters created by their author, Cari Luna. Really, what more could I ask for? And her lyrical epilogue spoke to me as a native New Yorker no longer living in New York, for New York City left me long before I left it.

Karen Germain says

I love stories about fringe societies and outsiders. Stories about lives that are so completely opposite of my own fascinate me. The theme is what really caught my attention in Cari Luna's debut novel, *The Revolution of Every Day*.

Set in the mid-90's, *The Revolution of Every Day* follows a group of squatters in New York City, who are forced into a legal battle to legitimize their claim on a building that they have occupied for over a decade. The story is not as simple as just a group fighting for their home, there is also plenty of tension in the group, as certain members question their role in the community and the depth of their commitment to the cause.

Luna tells her story through several different voices. There is Cat, a former junkie, turned leader and the resident old-timer of the group. Newly pregnant Amelia, a former teen runaway who was brought into the group by Gerrit, an expat from the Netherlands with a tragic past. Steve, a married man who is the father of Amelia's baby. Annie, Steve's unwitting wife, who joined the group to fight for social equality, but who longs to return to her middle-class roots. Luna's story is character based and although the fight for their home is a constant point of tension, the drama between the characters and the secrets that they hold within themselves, is really heart of the story.

All of the characters exist just at the edge of their individual breakpoint and the entire story is spent waiting to see who will crack first. It's surprising and engaging.

As always, Tin House has a great eye for debut authors. I read this book while on vacation and I absolutely couldn't put it down. Luna's rich characters and intense scenarios kept me wanting more. I flew through the story, needing to keep reading "just one more chapter" before bed or in stolen moments while waiting in lines at theme parks!

Luna's novel is a force to be reckoned with and I look forward to reading her future efforts.

Like my review? Check out my blog!

Tevilla says

Read this book. More than good. It will live in my head for awhile.

Nicole says

Oh, how I loved this book. I drank all its pages like honey, wine, something guzzly. I guzzled it. I also made a complete fangirl fool of myself at the Tin House booth at AWP 2014 when Cari Luna was there, one of those "OMG hi I really liked your book because words." Which was, completely understandably, met with a polite smile and maybe a well-repressed eye roll. All I had was "No seriously all your words because words and pretty"...and there went my dream of charming an author I'd become so enchanted with and leading us into a soft-focus BFF writer-friendship. It's okay. I can live with my often laughable public awkwardness.

That went a little off track. Refocusing...

So. This is a book about a group of folks essentially squatting in an abandoned building in New York City. They, as well as a group squatting in the building next door, have really cleaned the place up. They don't technically "own" it, but nobody else is using it and they've managed, through odd jobs and found materials and friends, to make it a reasonable home.

We mostly follow Amelia, a young woman who has a complicated relationship with Gerrit (a fellow squatter). Amelia, as we learn very early (and on the back cover of the book), is just learning that she's pregnant by Gerrit's married best friend (the best friend and his wife are also co-squatters). We also see her connecting with an older woman from the squat next door, Cat. We actually get to spend a little time in Cat's POV, too, which is a voice I really enjoyed reading. The book follows Amelia's trajectory during the pregnancy--how it affects her relationships and the whole group of squatters. It also delves into some of the politics surrounding their stay there, as the city is taking an interest in these abandoned spaces again.

It's been some time since I read this, but I still distinctly remember liking how messed up all the characters are in their own ways. There is no shiny, unassailable, "perfect" character. There is no clear villain. There is a group of people trying to do the best they can while still making imperfect decisions and sometimes being (mostly) inadvertently awful to each other.

My favorite part about this read, though, as evidenced by my bumbly attempt at chatting with the author, was the language. Examples? Oh, yes. Here are a few of the many sections next to which I doodled stars and exclamation points:

"Thirteen House groans and creaks, shifting her bones, old ship in a storm. Not that Amelia's ever been on a ship in a storm. Not that Amelia's ever been on anything bigger than a rowboat. Well, the Staten Island Ferry that one time, but that hardly seems to count."

"Anne smiles. She and Steve went to Ben's parents' apartment for Thanksgiving one year. The place was lousy with Jesuses. Steve accidentally knocked one off a side table with his elbow, the big oaf, and Jesus had suffered a slightly chipped toe. Ben's mother had spent the rest of the day pushing statuettes away from table edges, eyeing Steve nervously anytime he moved. Steve's joke about watching the chipped toe to see if it would magically regenerate probably hadn't helped."

"Dan's tables are already set up and heavy with produce. Radishes and turnips, beets purple as a bruise. The wind blows through the market, carrying the bitter-green winter smell of the brassicas: kale, cabbage, collards. It's got to be the cleanest smell in the world. And then the hint of fresh blood coming off the meat stand. That's got to be the truest smell in the world."

Bottom line: Read this. Seriously.

Steve Earley says

I thoroughly loved this book. The topic was enough to draw me in, and the characters and plot develop so well, but ultimately it is the choices Cari Luna has made as a writer that make this clear five-star territory for me. I love the shifting perspectives, and how we see the world through one character, and then a few pages later, that character has shifted to the background. We gain an intimate understanding of the five main personalities in the book, but then we also see them, and all of their faults, through the other characters.

Luna also drops these amazing, insightful observations on our culture and gentrification throughout the book. Take this one on page 245. Luna chronicles an dumpster-diving adventure some characters take on the Upper East Side, racking up dozens of clean bagels, dairy products that expire the day after tomorrow, bruised fruit, dented cans of soup and bent cereal boxes. "People don't want to buy dinged cans. Don't want to buy boxes that show they've been touched by hands before theirs" and then a few paragraphs later is this great nugget that captures the decline of New York City over the past two decades:

"It feeds them, yeah, but you have to wonder what's going to become of a place with so little tolerance for dings and dents, for bruises, for small scars."

This book is such a great tribute to the "brash and ragged children" that modern New York has devoured, uprooted, torn down, and eventually replaced with the people version of the generic, shiny, soulless condos of the modern-day LES and Brooklyn.

Beverly says

Cari Luna's debut novel is close to perfection.

The setting is carefully rendered. I could smell, taste, hear, see it all. The characters move me with their imperfections. They are so human in their desires, in their flaws. Luna provides an even-handed description of even minor characters, making this world, these people mean something important to the reader. On the sentence level, there is a lyric sensibility that also contains the edginess appropriate for the subject.

I read the novel in two afternoons. I didn't want it to end. The graceful character and plot development work to build a novel that I believe will be valued not only for its historical content, but for its brilliant writing.

Luna has taken a moment in NYC's history and created a beautiful elegy to it, to the Lower East Side of the mid-90s. This novel will demand that you turn it over in your mind, discuss it, re-read it.

Kevin says

Despite being longer than my short attention span can usually handle and being about a subject matter (squatters) I don't know much about, I found myself savoring this life-like drama and the inner turmoil of her finely tuned characters. Luna's debut shows how people who are usually looked away from (or down on) can be as engaging and heroic as anyone else. *The Revolution of Every Day* is a book that will make you care--and understand--more.

Catherine at The Gilmore Guide to Books says

By the mid-1980s there was an entire subsection of lower Manhattan that had been abandoned by the city. Landlords had neglected their buildings, tenants left, and the underworld took over. It was about this time that a small group of people began to reclaim buildings that were empty and close to demolition. They were known as squatters because they moved in but paid no rent. In many cases they were drug users and homeless, simply looking for a place to get high and to sleep but in Cari Luna's debut novel *The Revolution*

of Every Day, we meet 5 adults who have reclaimed two buildings and created a community. Some have jobs while the rest are artisans and activists but while they may not be able to earn a living in Manhattan they are determined to make a life. They restore the buildings using only materials that have been thrown away at other construction sites and get the majority of their food from what has been discarded at grocery stores and restaurants, much of which is undamaged.

The rest of this review can be read at The Gilmore Guide to Books: <http://wp.me/p2B7gG-yW>
