

Out of the Easy

Ruta Sepetys

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Ruta Sepetys draws readers into the setting of the French Quarter, New Orleans in 1950 and how its intricacies affect 17-year-old Josie Moraine. Born to a neglectful mother, Josie has learned how to be self-sufficient from a young age. She works in a bookstore and as a housemaid in a brothel, hoping that she will earn enough to escape her life as the daughter of a prostitute and explore beyond what the Quarter has to offer. Josie eventually applies to Smith College in Massachusetts, but it's not only a lack of funds that stands in the way of her dreams. The relationships she's cultivated, a less-than-perfect parentage, an investigation into the death of a man who died on the same day he visited the bookstore at which Josie works—these all tie her to the very place she yearns to escape. However, as Josie navigates her way through her challenges, she learns that the future she desires is not altogether unattainable, not when it's dependent on her choices.

This is my first book from Ruta Sepetys, but I've heard that she is a pretty notable name among young-adult historical fiction works. After reading *Out of the Easy*, I can definitely tell why. Her description of the novel's setting is rich and engrossing, and I could see myself in Josie's place, living in the Quarter. I initially thought this novel was going to be like a classic film noir, what with the murder investigation mentioned in the back cover. Then as I read through it, I found that it was more of a coming-of-age story; it focused on Josie as a character and how she changes and grows in response to various events. I was a little bit disappointed, but I still enjoyed reading about Josie's journey. So just a word of caution for anyone who thinks the plot will revolve around a murder mystery: it won't, but the story is great nevertheless.

Part of the reason why I liked reading about Josie's journey is because of all the supporting characters. Patrick, Cokie, Willie and those working in her brothel, and Jesse all have their own personalities; they aren't cardboard cutouts who are merely there to make the protagonist look good. They are essential to Josie's conflict and solution, and I think Sepetys beautifully depicted their interactions with Josie. The supporting characters also show that family extends beyond biology; none of them are related to Josie, yet they love and support her regardless. Additionally, there is a love triangle between Josie, Patrick, and Jesse. I normally hate that trope, but I liked it in this context because 1) it wasn't the center of the story; 2) it wasn't the "Bad Boy vs. Childhood Best Friend" cliché found in most triangles; and 3) Josie's relationships with Patrick and Jesse were realistic.

Readers ages 13 and up will enjoy this novel. Although Sepetys's works are geared towards young adults, I think that adults will find that reading *Out of the Easy* is a pleasant experience as well.

Recommended Titles

Prisoner of Night and Fog by Anne Blankman

Full Cicada Moon by Marilyn Hilton

The Downstairs Girl by Stacey Lee