

VENTURA BOOK REVIEWS

Where will the next book take you?

OUT OF THE EASY

by Ruta Sepetys



Sepetys

Ruta Sepetys has written three books, all of which are young adult historical fiction. Although she writes in what may seem like a specific niche, Sepetys draws in readers of all ages and interests. I have read all three of her novels and loved each one equally. *Out of the Easy* is Sepetys' second novel.

Josie Moraine is the 17-year-old daughter of a brothel prostitute. Born (and somewhat raised) in New Orleans, Jo is ready to leave and start off afresh at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. But the lack of funds and endless ties to "The Big Easy," let alone the absence of an acceptance letter, hold her back. As she waits for a letter from the college, she struggles with an air-headed mother, a strong-willed brothel madam, the mob, and many other conflicts along the way. Sepetys' story takes the reader back to New Orleans in 1950 through the eyes of an unfortunate young girl.

The characters in *Out of the Easy* are each unique with their own quirks. I immediately took a liking to the

main character, Jo. She is real with flaws and a breaking point. I appreciated that she would break down and cry when the weight of the world overwhelmed her. A typical story about a 17-year-old whose life is in ruins would be about a girl who has boy problems but Jo's problems well surpass that. The reader can also understand Jo's love-hate relationship she has with her mother. The mother says so many things that easily make you cringe but Jo holds her tongue and continues to try to live her own life without her mother's influence. A line on page 37 summed up both the mother and daughter. Jo's friend's father, Charlie, once told Jo about her mother, "Feel sorry for her. She's not near as smart as you. She wasn't born with your compass, so she wanders around, bumping into all sorts of walls. That's sad."

A literary technique that I love to experience is when a small, seemingly purposeless thing seems to pop up every so often throughout the book that has a larger meaning. In this novel, it was Jo's humming and the insult of being "salted peanuts." Those small details become more important as the story progresses and I love when they work into making the story stronger.

If I have to point out one salty thing about *Out of the Easy*, it is that a pet peeve of mine is involved in the story. I don't like reading books about other people who like to read books. It comes off as too easy or too cliché for me. Jo works and lives in a bookshop, so there are times when authors are being quoted or old classics are being mentioned. It can seem almost like the author is bragging sometimes that they are well-rounded in literary history. I don't think Sepetys crosses that line; it's just something I thought I'd mention.

As the pages grew thinner I wasn't sure how it would end. Eventually things started to fade out, strings were tied, and things started to make sense. I even started to tear up a little. All in all, *Out of the Easy* was another great read from Ruta Sepetys. According to her website, Sepetys is working on another novel and I plan to watch for its release so that I can get my hands on it.

Reviewed by Grace Ventura