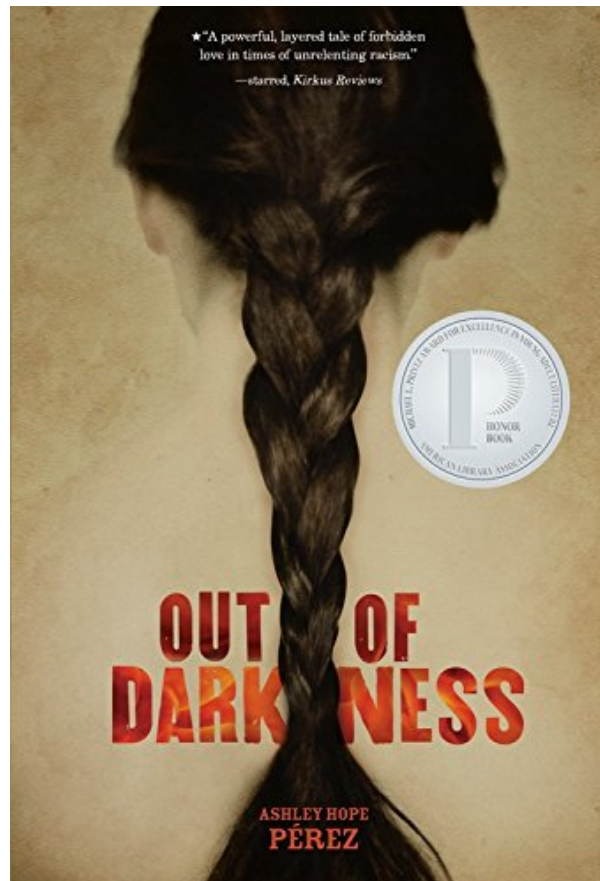
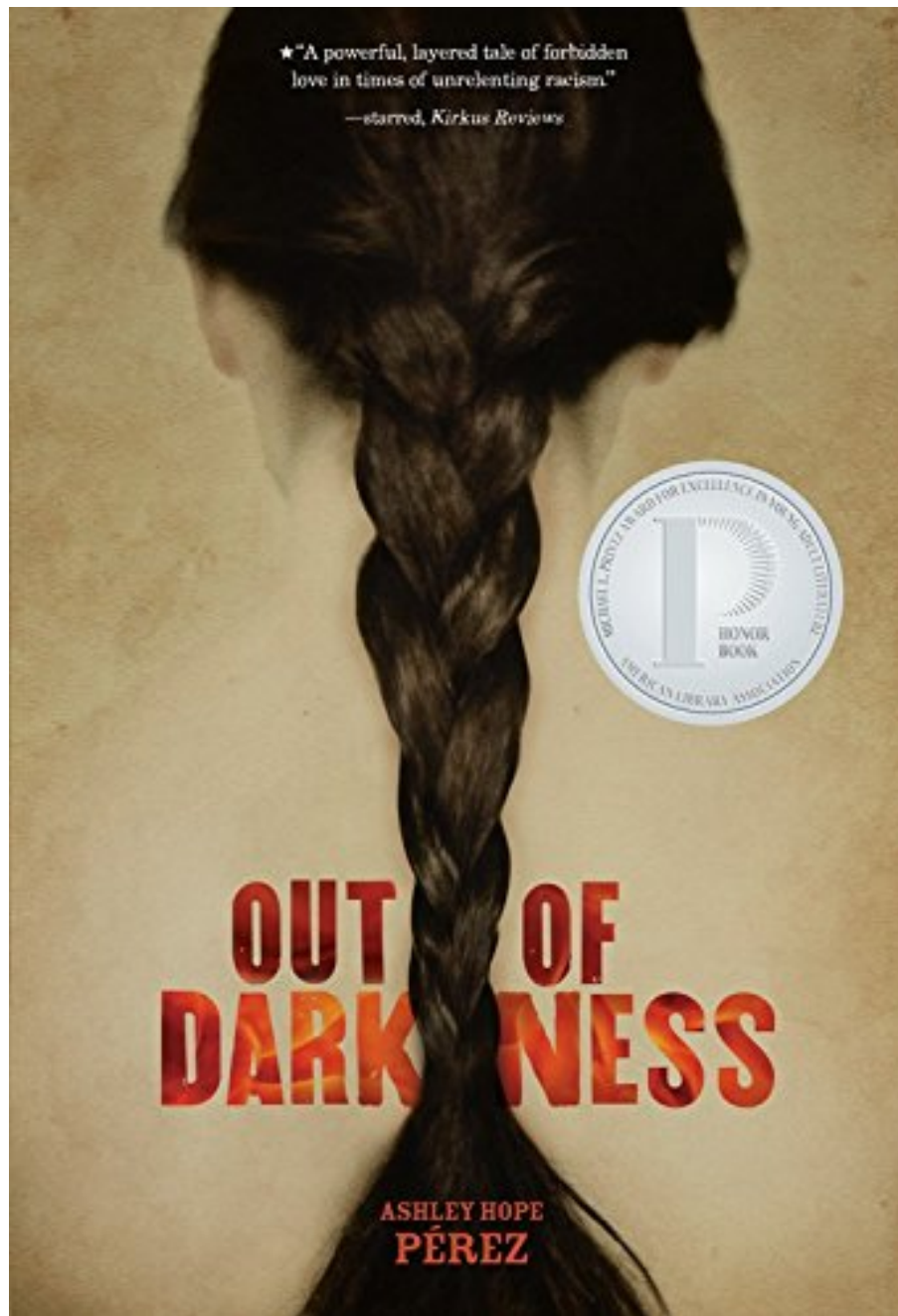


OUT OF DARKNESS (FICTION - YOUNG ADULT) BY ASHLEY HOPE PÉREZ



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From School Library Journal

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"This is East Texas, and there's lines. Lines you cross, lines you don't cross. That clear?"

New London, Texas. 1937. Naomi Vargas and Wash Fuller know about the lines in East Texas as well as anyone. They know the signs that mark them. They know the people who enforce them. But sometimes the attraction between two people is so powerful it breaks through even the most entrenched color lines. And the consequences can be explosive.

Ashley Hope Pérez takes the facts of the 1937 New London school explosion the worst school disaster in American history as a backdrop for a riveting novel about segregation, love, family, and the forces that destroy people.

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- Binding: Hardcover
- 408 pages

From School Library Journal

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Most helpful customer reviews

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Masterful, heartbreaking storytelling!

By Latinxs in Kid Lit

As soon as I finished this novel, I wanted to reread it. I want to pull it apart and study it because it's that good. One of the things I appreciate most was the slow burn of the narrative. The novel opens with the

explosion, and then flashes back to show how the characters' lives intersect before the event. The fuse lit in that opening scene coils through the narrative, gaining in intensity as the story leads back to the explosion and then its aftermath. The tension in Naomi's home, school, and community is palpable throughout the story and increases slowly as we're lead into the heartbreaking climax.

The author masterfully balances the big picture and the smallest details. Her writing made me think of a photographer who could both go wide and capture a panoramic view and then zoom in for a close up and not lose anything in this process. She also beautifully balances the swoony magic of falling deeply in love for the first time and the absolutely brutal realities faced by African-Americans and Mexicans at this time in history. She tells a story set in the American past and makes it feel of the moment. It holds all the markers of a historical novel, starting with the cataclysmic explosion of 1937 that looms with ominous eventuality over the characters we readers come to care about. Threaded with lively detail, the historical richness comes through in social customs, daily activities, and the speech patterns and cultural attitudes typical of 1930s east Texas. No easy feat. I detect a massive amount of research behind it all.

This devotion to authenticity translates into contemporary meaning through the story's characters and the complicated problems they face. Naomi's most serious problem is a predatory stepfather whose capacity for evil keeps her in a constant state of vigilance. There is no easy escape for her. She has no money or resources and she feels deep loyalty toward her two tender stepsiblings. Because Naomi is Mexican-American and lives in a part of Texas where Mexicans aren't numerous, she has no community to fall back on and is looked upon by some white classmates as dirty and worthless. When she falls hard for Wash, a young black man who offers her a chance at true happiness, Naomi steps into the arena of forbidden love—one she must keep hidden from society and the stepfather who follows her every move with lascivious eyes. What a story!

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Holy book hangover.

By Donna C

I don't get book hangovers very often but when I finished reading *OUT OF DARKNESS* I swore, I took the names of various deities in vain, and I stared off into space for a few minutes. I was physically exhausted by the time I read the last line. This book will just tear you apart from the inside out and spit you out on the back end.

OUT OF DARKNESS is a dark book that deals with some really rough things like blatant and violent racism and statutory rape. At times it's a difficult book to read but it's so damn compelling I dare you to willingly put it down. If life didn't get in the way I have no doubt I would have just plowed through this in a (very long) sitting.

The story itself focuses on a real event that happened in East Texas where leaking gas caused a white school to explode back in 1937. The majority of the events that happen around that particular moment are fictional but they're not outside the realm of reason. Some of the things are outlandish and grotesque and as a human being you'll have a hard time fathoming how people can think in such ways and act in even worse ways. But when you sit down and you really let that darkness in you'll know that while these specific events may be fictional what they're based on is not. This country went through some dark times and that kind of thinking runs deep, even today, and hopefully dragging it out into the light in such a way gives people a reminder that this wasn't that long ago, racism isn't dead, and if we allow this ignorance to come back into the light this is the kind of fear that everyone would be living in.

Perez switched POVs between Naomi, Beto (Naomi's little brother), Wash (Naomi's love interest), and Henry (Naomi's step-father), with a sprinkling of The Gang thrown in, this mob mentality thought bubble

that isn't specific to any one individual but the collective brain of those thinking the same things. It didn't need to be specific and that was the point. It's a look into the hive brain functioning in East Texas and it's meant to be horrifying.

I'll start with Henry first because he's just repugnant. But getting into his head you see his thought process. I don't think it's meant as a way of understanding why he did what he did but it allows you a look behind the curtain to see how he's reasoning with himself and how his mind is breaking down everything that's happening. There's a high level of expectation and ownership because he's a white man and certain things should be bestowed upon him. Henry has a very solid ideal of what his life should be like but when reality doesn't match up with that he doesn't know how to cope so he allows his anger, his frustration, and his scapegoating to really rear its ugly head and take his failings out outwardly, where he thinks they belong. As a rational human being reading his sections it's horrifying because there is nothing rational about Henry.

Naomi, Beto, and Wash are just trying to exist in this really messed up world. Naomi and Wash are well aware of the world of racism around them and they try to function around them as much as possible. Beto just loves who he loves and skin color means nothing to him. He recognizes right from wrong and knows enough that even when someone of authority does something wrong he shouldn't blindly follow. He's not aware of the blatant racism around him, being light-skinned and able to pass for white. He doesn't see how people treat Naomi or Wash (in part because they don't allow him to see it) and when he does see injustices toward them happening he doesn't fall into the hive. He hurts when people he loves hurt and it's heartbreaking to see him in pain.

Naomi and Wash are two just incredibly endearing characters that are immediately likable. Naomi is a little more outwardly bitter (for lack of better words) and evasive toward people because of how she's been treated in her past while Wash, at the insistence of his father, has adapted to it in a way that forces him to kowtow to people spitting on him. Each have adapted to shut out the world around them and function as best they can but when they find each other and those public barriers come down they can finally be who they really are and they both open up to each other.

The ending, though, is what really destroyed me. No spoilers but I'll just say things don't get better. *OUT OF DARKNESS* is a difficult, brutal look at a window to our country's history when everyone was suffering but some moreso than others at the hands of those who had it a little better simply because of skin color. It's a look at what did happen in our past but it doesn't mean this kind of thinking stayed in our past. It's a rather apt book to read considering the talking orangutan running for Republican presidential nominee who has no problem publicly scapegoating minorities and wants to actually evict those people from this country. Racism is not dead. Not by a longshot and this book is a lesson in how bad it was and how bad it could be again. Lessons are hard learned and a lot of the people in this book didn't learn them. Reading that should make your skin crawl. This *SHOULD* be a painful book to get through, in so many different ways. If it doesn't tear at your soul a little it may make me question your humanity.

5

I received a copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

The Worst, Best Book You Should Read

By Nicole Glassley

I have a hard time giving this book five stars because I hated it.

But I hated it because it made me cry. I hated it because it was devastating. It felt real. I closed the book and dropped it on the floor (ahem. threw it on the floor... but not hard (not that hard)) and felt like these were real people that I knew and real people that I'd lost and it takes a pretty spectacular story to become that invested in the lives of fictional characters.

This wasn't a particularly easy book, but most of it was really enjoyable. The relationship Naomi has with the twins and the friendships she builds with Tommie and Wash, the truly fascinating descriptions of the richest town of America during the height of the Great Depression, the FORMAT, the way the story builds on itself until you know it isn't going anywhere good, but you're too invested to stop... Every single sentence is deliberate. Every single word serves a purpose. This is really well-authored book. If you hate yourself, you should absolutely read it. Don't even hesitate.

There are a lot of trigger warnings for this one. Sexual abuse, rape, violence against women, violence against everyone, racism, sexism, murder, dead bodies, guns, child abuse, and honestly probably more that I'm forgetting, **THIS WAS A REALLY ROUGH BOOK.**

See all 68 customer reviews...

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