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Frances Parkinson Keyes

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A young woman brought up in a Brahmin family on Beacon Hill and her husband are exposed to different cultures for the first time when he joins a law firm that has experimented by hiring a Jew, an Irishman, and an Italian, in addition to their traditional Protestants. Can Emily and Roger befriend these seeming upstarts without offending their own families and associates?

Joy Street Details

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From Reader Review Joy Street for online ebook

Cynthia Stead says

This is perhaps the best book about Boston, Boston society, and its wedding cake of tiers and classes ever written. A little known classic.

Gail says

A good choice if one ever desires to read Mrs. Keyes. The novel takes place in Boston and depicts quite accurately the social mores and unbelievable prejudices that governed "upper class" society there during the first half of the twentieth century.

Joyce says

Picked up on a free shelf in a public library. My mother had a copy on her bookshelf all the while I was growing up, but I don't remember reading it before now.

Here's what I like, which is what my mother no doubt liked as well: it's historical, with vivid descriptions of places in Boston (where my mother worked when the book was written).

I did not take offense at the references to immigrants' country of origin or the terms used because I know they were used freely in the time period portrayed. I do not mean that they are not offensive nowadays, they are, but taken in context I do not fault the author for her use of them in the story.

What I don't like: the characters, the way in which the story unfolds, the missed opportunities with characters, the amount of unnecessary pieces to the story, and the undeveloped pieces which would draw the reader in; most of all I object to the deliberate lack of emphasis on the faith theme in the book.

Personally, in my humble opinion, the author was decades before her time. She would have fit quite well into the tolerance of the 21st century, in spite of the social theme of her book. I have no objection to her support of class inclusion, but the way it is portrayed is unrealistic in my mind. What would I know, having never been in a home on Beacon Hill?

What I really hated about the book, for which I should have stopped reading and not finished it, was the reader's privy to the thinking of Emily. Another reason why I think the author was ahead of her time. I find it difficult to believe the 'heart' issues ... it was like reading a soap opera. This is not a quick read. It goes on for many pages, not particularly deep, just wordy to the point where I found myself editing as I read. But the disloyalty of her heart, and the many scenes used to show this, were disturbing to this reader.

I know this author is well known and I am undoubtedly stepping on toes, but I am being honest. I cannot recommend this book.

Terry Ruppel says

Loved this book! It was a best seller during the year I was born. I had several to choose from as this was a decision by our group for everyone to choose a best seller from the year we were born. I chose this book after reading a brief description of the subject matter and was not disappointed. Historical fiction is my favorite genre and the location in the Boston area where my mother's family first lived in America was intriguing.

Sophie says

You have to appreciate the egoism of Frances Parkinson Keyes. I mean, what else but rampant egomania would lead a writer to begin her book with a foreword detailing the overwhelming difficulties and sacrifices of her life as a best-selling author?

I also hope that *Joy Street* will seem worth while to enough other people, so that eventually the effort which went into it will seem worth while to me, after all.

(Or as Lina Lamont put it: "If we bring a little joy into your humdrum lives, it makes us feel as though our hard work ain't been in vain for nothin'.") Once Keyes finishes describing the terrible burden of being a talented writer, she begins her acknowledgements, but can't resist slipping in random tidbits about all the times she correctly described some house or artifact without benefit of having researched it.

...it was one thing to have visualized a silver-gilt tea set, of which there were actually five; it was quite another to visualize a signet ring of which there was only one!

Such brilliance! She then concludes the foreword by detailing when and where she wrote the outline, the various places and times she produced the first draft, and when and where she finished the book and wrote the foreword. Sheesh, what an ego.

With that intro to overcome, a book had better be damned good. This one isn't. The author has lofty ambitions (natch) but doesn't follow them through. For me, the biggest reason the book doesn't succeed is that there isn't any real character growth, no hero's journey. Emily is essentially the same person at the end of the story as she is at the beginning. What we're left with is a catalogue of events with very little depth (historic verisimilitude does not equal depth) and lots of extraneous details. (So many extraneous details and random tangents that I almost regretted I hadn't gone for the abridged version.)

Clearly, the author's purpose in writing this story (the effort that cost her so very much!) was to combat bigotry and racism (she was diversity before diversity was cool), but I doubt she succeeded in convincing anyone. For one thing, she makes the Irish, Italian and Jewish lawyers hired by the Boston firm too perfect to be real. Especially David Salomont, the Jewish lawyer, who is so talented, smart and wonderful he borders on insufferable. Frankly, I found him so unappealing (underneath his perfection and charm is an arrogance and cynicism that was more than off-putting) that I wondered if FPK's commitment to combating antisemitism was as deep as she thought it was. (Not hard to imagine that an egomaniac of her proportions would be oblivious to her own deeply held prejudices.) She comes closest to succeeding with Brian Collins, the Irish character, whose situation and family seem most realistic. She even shows what the Irish characters are up against in Boston, making the reader see the prejudice they face. (Unlike the Jewish character who talks about facing prejudice, but is met everywhere he goes in Boston with nothing but acceptance and

admiration.)

Overall, I'm sorry I couldn't like this story more, but I'm starting to think I need to give up on FPK. This is the fourth of her (really, really lo-o-ong) novels that I've read, and they have all shared the same flaw: too much plot, not enough characterization. And after all her costly, life-draining work...!

Linda says

The destiny of a Boston Brahmin family is changed by the husband's Italian, Irish, and Jewish law partners. Takes place between 1636-1946. I lived in Boston for college plus a few years, and I love Boston stories.

CLM says

A dated yet compelling look at a fictional marriage and lifestyle in the early-to-mid 20th century that confronted the prejudices of Brahmin Boston. While the attitudes may seem shocking to the modern reader, Keyes, as always, depicts a bygone era with care and vivid accuracy. The Beacon Hill setting, just a few blocks from the Massachusetts State House and from John Kerry's beautiful home, add an appealing element.

Cynthia J says

Incredibly detailed and a good basic story. Of course these people practically have monopoly money and assets but there's a nice feeling of Boston's Beacon Hill and an old world that's gone now. I read this years ago but did enjoy rereading it.

Nancy says

Keyes writes a family story about love and how love changes through time. She also writes about loyalty and responsibility taken on through marriage. Expectations aren't always what they seem and those same expectations not always realized.

Nadine Sutton says

well written and elegant, giving a picture of upper class Bostonian society, in the 1930s and with an interesting mix of characters

Mary Jo says

This was an adult book that told its story without stooping to tawdry detail. I loved the way the stories were

enmeshed and gradually unfolded. It kept my interest for over 700 pages, I never once thought that it dragged.

Marie Saville says

He adorado la mayor parte del libro: la minuciosa ambientación, la relación del matrimonio protagonista, la comunidad que forman en su nuevo hogar... Podría decir que todo hasta ese momento, hacia el final de la historia, en el que todo se vuelve enrevesado y forzado. ¡Qué lástima!

Pdswhite says

This book was so filled with emotion. I read it as a young married woman who was not finding everything in my marriage which I had thought would be there. So it was disturbing to read about this young woman and what happened in her life. Also was great to learn about the Back Bay of Boston. Ms. Keyes books are quite accurate in the history in which the book is set.

Ellen says

If you are reading this review either (1) you are already familiar with Keyes and her literary bon-bons and wonder if this one holds its taste in the 21st century or (2) you were charmed by the vintage book jacket at a library book sale and wonder whether to actually read it. In the case of 1, mostly. Keyes's sympathies clearly lay with the "modern" Boston Brahman newlyweds trying to expand the scope of their life beyond their conservative upbringing. She does a nice job of depicting life among the rich and wannabe rich in Boston, revolving around the young lawyers in a maverick law firm. It's an interesting note that big law firm law was thought to be just as soul-crushing in the 1930s as it is today. (2) If this book appealed to you enough to buy, you will probably have seen "Old Acquaintance" on TCM, the one where Miriam Hopkins writes vastly popular "women's novels" out of spite and jealousy directed at her best frenemy, "serious writer" Bette Davis. "Joy Street" is exactly the kind of book Miriam Hopkins's character would have written. Act accordingly.
