

Half Outlaw

Alex Temblador

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(260pp)

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A woman faces a personal reckoning in Half Outlaw, a touching novel about what it's like to reject—or embrace—complicated people.

An orphaned woman reckons with her troubled upbringing in Alex Temblador's visceral novel *Half Outlaw*.

Raqi was raised by her drug-addicted uncle, Dodge, who belonged to the Lawless Motorcycle Club. But she distanced herself from that life and is now a partner at a Los Angeles law firm. Still, she guards her emotions. When Billy, the new Lawless leader, calls upon her to join a grieving ride in honor of Dodge, Raqi agrees, but only after Billy promises to share her mysterious grandfather's address with her—and to keep the Lawless away from her—afterward.

Interwoven timelines cover Raqi's 1960s upbringing with Dodge and her present in the 1990s. At calculated points, they reveal the people whom Dodge and Raqi knew. They also expose the huge gulf between how Raqi was raised and how she now regards herself. She is lucid in recalling instances of neglect and violence, but as she eases back into the rituals of the Lawless, her outlook shifts: the group she once wanted to escape from still affects her, and in surprising new ways. She's able to recognize its nuances and to take note of its rich subculture. She still recognizes the bikers' flaws, but she also witnesses their acts of tenderness. In the process, she also reconsiders Dodge, whose rough parenting skills concealed his pride in her. The disconnect between her memories and such revelations rattles her.

Raqi is half Mexican, and her sense of her own otherness is compounded by other people's racist comments. In the past, she even suppressed facets of herself to stay safe. With feet in two worlds, she delivers potent observations about belonging as she struggles to fit within the hierarchy of the Lawless. She questions what it means to be Mexican without knowing how to speak Spanish, and her self-considerations are sharp.

In this compelling story about extended families, love follows a shifting course. The cast is complex, even viewed through Raqi's critical eyes. She is a reluctant niece within the Lawless but learns to accept them at a gradual, grudging pace. She establishes cause for empathy toward them and also forms a genuine friendship with a Lawless woman. And glimmerings of magic underlie it all, serving as emotional cues within harsh situations.

Working toward a traumatic crescendo and a personal reckoning, the thoughtful novel *Half Outlaw* follows a Latina woman as she pursues healing after joining her deceased uncle's motorcycle club for one last ride.

KAREN RIGBY (August 18, 2022)

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