

Kaya Days

Carl de Souza

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In Carl de Souza's novel *Kaya Days*, a simple errand leads a teenager into a days-long odyssey.

Santee leaves her house one afternoon to bring her brother, Ram, home from school, only to be told he is missing. Her search puts her in the middle of the 1999 Mauritian riots. Inflamed by the police murder of a popular singer, Santee's hometown descends into the chaos of burning and looting, dragging her along with it. Over the next two days, Santee is as transformed as her city.

As the older child, Santee is often put in charge of her younger brother. Ram is the light of the family: brilliant, full of promise, and allowed to get away with anything, while Santee is expected to be the responsible one. Just as her mother expects certain behavior from her, so do the men she encounters during the riots: a casino owner tries to force crude comfort from her, while a taxi driver mistakes her for a sex worker and treats her like an exotic delight. Long, rambling sentences are used to express Santee's confusion and detachment, as well as the tumult of those fateful days.

Santee's story is rife with both physical and emotional perils. For the first time, she is called on to make decisions, and to sort out her feelings toward her free-spirited brother and her own place in the world. Soon, she determines to stop being a lost child and take control of her own experience. Just as the riots change Mauritius, so might Santee's search for Ram allow her to become someone new.

Kaya Days is a frantic, stream-of-consciousness novel in which a teenager comes of age in the middle of violent upheaval.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (September / October 2021)

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