



## Out of Time

**Sylvia Townsend**

FriesenPress (Dec 10, 2013)

Softcover \$26.99 (344pp)

978-1-4602-1195-3

*Out of Time is an easy read for those who enjoy romance novels and a glimpse of history not often seen.*

A blend of historical fiction and contemporary characters, *Out of Time* explores the idea of past lives and reincarnation. Most of the story takes place in an elite bordello in eighteenth-century France, following the good-hearted prostitutes who live there. This is the backstory for two modern-day women and the men they love and loathe. The ultimate quest for both sets of characters seems simple enough—finding love—but the journey is fraught with complications, among them married lovers, friendships without the needed spark, and self-doubt.

It is not until three-fourths of the way through the book that it is clear where the novel is headed. That's where intriguing ideas like reincarnation and past-life regression are introduced. Lisette and Isabel are the down-on-their-luck ladies in France who, through no fault of their own, must become whores in order to survive. It's a sad choice to contemplate, but theirs becomes an existence of luxury and plenty, with men who not only pay premium fees for the services, but also respect and come to love them. In Isabel's case, she becomes legendary for the price paid to capture her virginity at the tender age of fourteen, a previously unheard of fee that establishes her bordello as the best in Paris.

The bits of soft erotica thrown in almost make up for their unbelievable circumstances. Though the love scenes play out a bit theatrically, it is this quality that helps the reader get lost in the words. Picture the far-East-themed room decked in swaths of lush fabrics and the scant costume worn by Isabel; all veil, midriff, and tinkling coins.

The French characters are described in detail, contrasting with the rather loosely sketched modern characters. Readers must wait for the most provocative idea, which is the gradually revealed supposition that a modern-day best seller could actually be the past-life memories of Marc, the contemporary protagonist.

It is human nature to root for the underdog, but there is only one way out for the women of the bordello; they must be saved by their "princes." The few sessions of therapy undertaken by one character reveal and solve his problems rather tidily. This is the same character who has a string of failed relationships due to his shallowness, yet he becomes amazingly self-aware after his counseling sessions. The first chapter, which introduces author Marc, his brother Nate, and the two supporting female characters, is difficult to plod through. There is a lot to keep track of as the main characters are introduced. The setting is a book-signing party with dialogue among four characters, including each one's observations about the party, each other, and their feelings, all combined with an undercurrent of tension between the brothers.

Overall, *Out of Time* is an easy read for those who enjoy romance novels and a glimpse of history not often seen. The bordello underworld is interesting and well described, as are the motivations and machinations of the men who frequent it. There are no surprises, but some will enjoy following along the predictable path from hardship to happiness.

FELICIA TOPP (February 19, 2014)

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